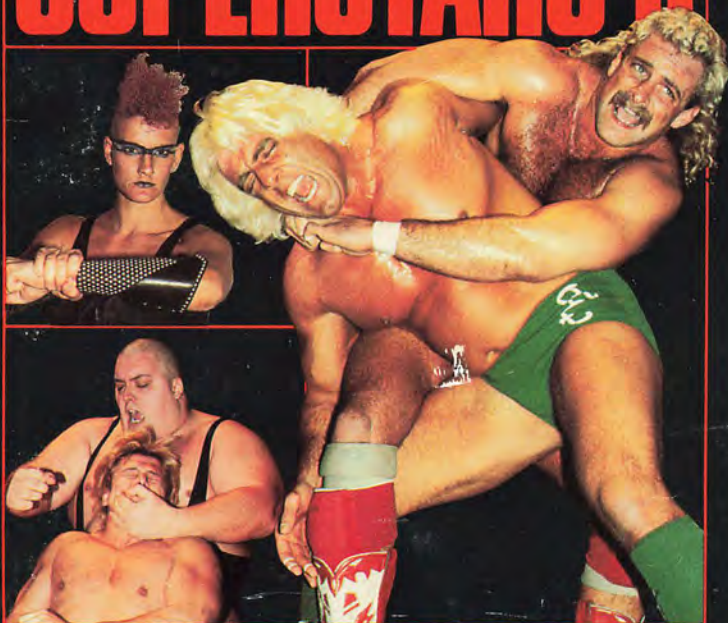




THE LATEST AND GREATEST ON YOUR FAVORITE STARS.....

WRESTLING SUPERSTARS II



DANIEL AND SUSAN COHEN

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WRESTLING SUPERSTARS II

**DANIEL AND SUSAN
COHEN**



AN ARCHWAY PAPERBACK
Published by POCKET BOOKS • NEW YORK

The wrestlers pictured on the front cover are, clockwise from the top: The Fabulous Ones, Magnum T.A., King Kong Bundy, and Lady Maxine.

AN ARCHWAY PAPERBACK *Original*



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To
Jerry Clark

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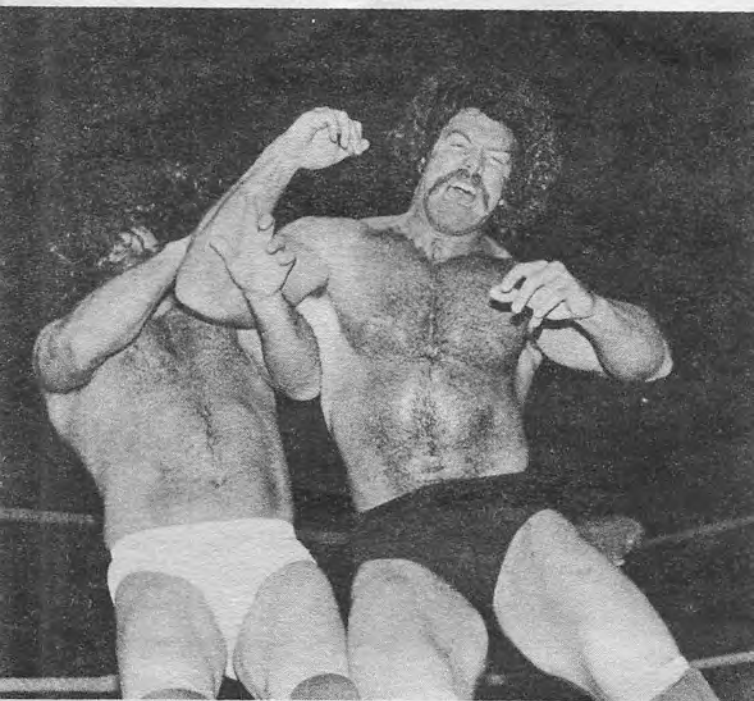
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WRESTLING SUPERSTARS II



Big Scott Hall delivers an elbow smash. © George Napolitano

THE EXPLOSION CONTINUES

A lot of people said that pro wrestling was just a fad. They said that fans would soon grow tired of it, and go on to something else, like the roller derby. The people who said that were dead wrong, because the popularity of wrestling is still on the upswing.

Wrestling shows are four of the top-ten cable television programs. *Saturday Night's Main Event* has been capturing a huge nationwide audience on NBC. There is now a Saturday morning wrestling cartoon show. Wrestlers have made videos, records and films. There are wrestling games, action figures and an endless supply of wrestling T-shirts, hats, posters, calendars and what have you. Tapes of notable matches are hot sellers in the video stores. But most of all, hordes of fans pack arenas all across the country to see their favorites in the ring. The legion of enthusiastic and knowledgeable wrestling fans is growing day by day.

If you're a new fan, you may only have heard of Hulk Hogan, Andre the Giant and a few

others. But there is something you must understand—the wrestling world is deeply divided. A wrestler can be a hero in one part of the country and practically unknown in another. That's true even with wrestling on television. A man may wrestle exclusively for one of the big wrestling associations, such as the National Wrestling Alliance (NWA) or the American Wrestling Association (AWA). But if you only have programs from the big World Wrestling Federation (WWF) in your area, you'll never see a wrestler from another group on TV. You may not even know he exists.

Who's the most popular wrestler today? Hulk Hogan, you say. You're probably right. But when a popular wrestling publication polled its readers—all good wrestling fans—they voted for Magnum T.A. most popular by a wide margin. Have you ever seen Magnum T.A. wrestle?

In our previous book, *Wrestling Superstars*, we told you about the Hulkster, Andre the Giant, Sergeant Slaughter, "Rowdy" Roddy Piper, Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka, Ric Flair, the Road Warriors and other stars of the day. The world of wrestling, however, has not been standing still. A whole crop of new talented and colorful stars has emerged. There is, of course, the popular Magnum. And what about that sensational pair the British Bulldogs, and Big Scott Hall?

Not only do the faces change, but personalities do as well. The drama of pro wrestling goes on both inside and outside the squared circle. Love has come to George "the Animal" Steele. Hate has consumed Larry Zbyszko and transformed him from one of the brightest stars to one of the most dangerous and embittered men in wrestling.

Do you want to know who Uncle Elmer really is? How about why both Gorgeous Jim Garvin and "Macho Man" Randy Savage don't like their brothers, and about the former college basketball player who is changing the face of women's wrestling? That and much more will be found in the pages that follow.

And we're going to tell you about the man who is, without a doubt, the most powerful and feared figure in wrestling today. Do you think you know who he is? Well read on and find out if you're right.

HEROES

MAGNUM T.A.

When wrestling fans are asked to list the most popular wrestlers, the name Magnum T.A. always comes out at or near the top. Fan popularity and genuine wrestling skill do not always go together. There are a number of very popular wrestlers whom experts scorn as more showmen and muscle men than real wrestlers. Not so with Magnum T.A. He's just as popular with the experts as he is with the ordinary fans. Some experts, including wrestling columnist and editor Bill Apter, predict that the good-looking and likable young man from Chesapeake, Virginia, will be one of the really great champions of the late '80s.

The year 1985 may have been Magnum's breakthrough year. He held the U.S. heavy-weight title in the NWA and he had wrestled the best on his way to the NWA world championship. He wasn't able to beat NWA champ Ric Flair in several attempts and ultimately lost his own U.S. championship belt to tough Tully Blanchard. But in wrestling, few champs hold a

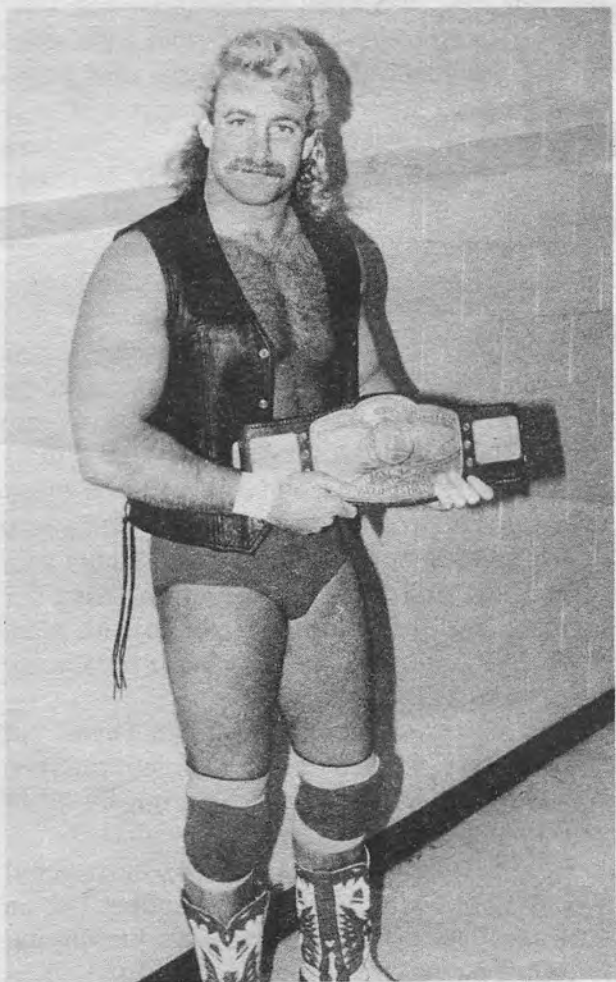
title for very long. Most champions—and Magnum is certainly one of them—put their titles on the line night after night, week after week. Even a very active boxing champ will only defend his title every few months. A wrestler's chance of losing is infinitely greater. But so is his chance of getting another shot and gaining his title back. So while Magnum was disappointed—even depressed—by his tough losses, he has by no means given up the chase.

Of course, there are many promising young wrestlers that appear, gain some recognition and then seem to drop from sight or settle into permanent undercard status. What sets Magnum apart from these, in the view of many observers of wrestling, is his seriousness and dedication. Some wrestlers who suddenly gain recognition and money plunge into living the high life, and they burn out. Not so with Magnum. Bill Apter followed Magnum on a vacation in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Said Apter, "Magnum had fun in Vegas, but he really couldn't wait to get back into the ring. A man that dedicated can't help but be NWA world champion someday."

What Magnum seemed to enjoy most about Vegas was not the one-armed bandits, but an arm-wrestling machine which gave him an opportunity to test his strength.

In the ring, Magnum is exceptionally intense, agile and extremely skillful. What's more he's



Magnum T.A. © Paul Heyman

improving his skills all the time, learning new moves. In addition to a lot of work in the gym, Magnum is also a student of wrestling, watching tapes of other matches and going over scouting reports. He doesn't like surprises when he meets an opponent.

He isn't a flashy dresser, and his only real gimmick is the name Magnum T.A. He used to wrestle under the name Terry Allen. He changed his name because of the popular TV show *Magnum P.I.* Terry Allen resembles the TV show's star, Tom Selleck, but with more muscles.

If you think Magnum sounds a wee bit dull, that means you have never seen one of his matches. Once in the ring this serious young man is explosive, and like all great wrestlers there is an underlying fury which can be released when he is pushed too far. In a recent match with Abdullah the Butcher—one of wrestling's more notorious bad guys—Magnum ended the match by hitting his opponent with a chair.

"I was wild. I was out of control. . . . That match was like a physical primal scream. I've had so much frustration lately, so much disappointment. . . . I got crazy, I went wild, I wrestled the kind of match I never would have wrestled a month ago."

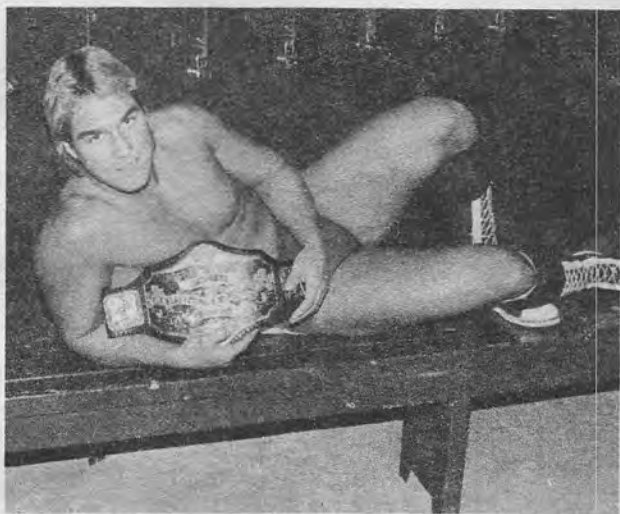
A little wildness, a little craziness is always

good for a wrestler. It keeps his opponents off balance, wondering and worrying what he will do next. That's just another weapon in this talented young man's already impressive arsenal.

TERRY TAYLOR

Terry Taylor may be part of a trend in wrestling. At first glance, the ranks of wrestlers seem to be dominated by enormous and bizarre-looking men who don't seem to know or care much about wrestling and its rules. Yet who are increasing numbers of wrestling fans flocking to arenas to see? In the opinion of the magazine *Sports Review Wrestling*, there is a new breed of "fast, agile crowd pleasers." The magazine might have described them as good-looking as well.

The review said: "They have extensive and successful amateur backgrounds. They have just begun to explore their potential and are expected to improve vastly in the years to come. Most important, they respect the rules—none of them uses the sport as an excuse to maim or destroy."



Terry Taylor. © Paul Heyman

This description was also applied to Terry Taylor, and it certainly fits.

"I figure I have a big advantage over anyone who considers me nothing more than a pretty boy. They're not expecting to find me capable of wrestling," said Taylor. Not too many opponents are making that mistake anymore.

Taylor was on the fast track to a major championship when his career became momentarily stalled by a tough loss to Buddy Landell. Taylor contended he didn't really lose the match, but it was stolen from him. Fans who saw the contest agreed, but that doesn't count in the wrestling record book.

After the match, Taylor, who was in hot pursuit of Ric Flair for the NWA championship belt, suddenly dropped out of sight. Was he injured? Discouraged? Scared? Rumors were flying.

None of it was true, said Taylor. He insisted that he had just become too obsessed with gaining the NWA title. The pursuit was crowding everything else out of his life.

"I'm not underplaying the importance of the title," said Taylor. "I'm a pro wrestler and I want that gold as much as anyone, but I'm also only going around once, if you'll pardon the cliché. Pro wrestling's allowed me to live a comfortable life, but I won't allow it to run my life." Taylor has always been known as one of the more modest and sane men in wrestling.

Although Taylor doesn't come right out and say it, there is also the politics of wrestling that must be kept in mind. The current NWA title holder is the very crafty Ric Flair. Flair's top contender is Magnum T.A., another fan favorite and good friend of Terry Taylor. Magnum is more experienced than Taylor, and the one considered far more likely to take the title from Flair. Would Taylor then be willing to fight his old friend? He said he would. "I'd even go outside and peddle tickets for the match."

But how would the fans react to a battle between the two favorites? More importantly, how would the promoters react? Would such a

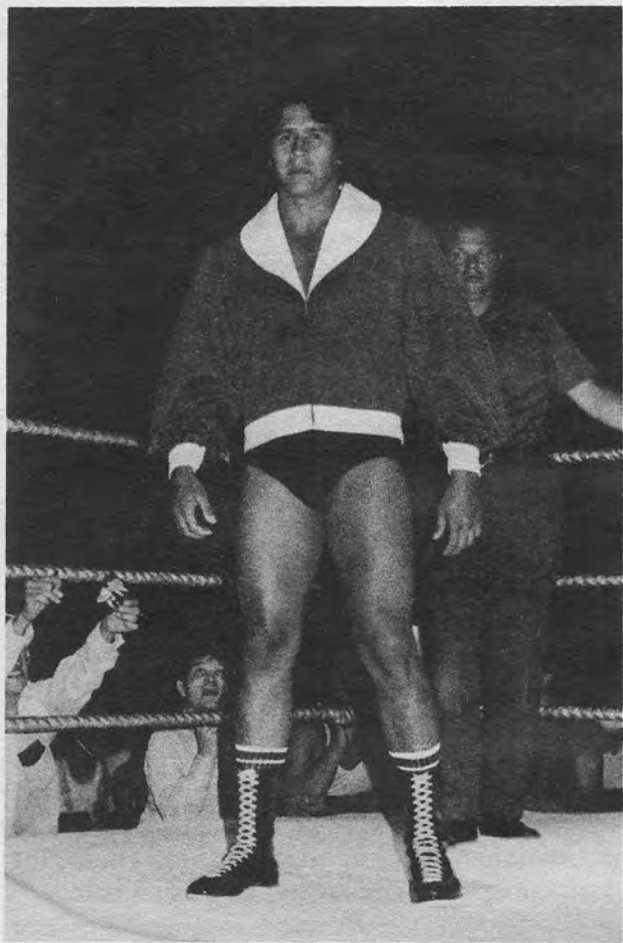
match even be allowed? Somehow, many fans don't think it would.

So, at least for the moment, Taylor has abandoned the NWA title quest. He's been wrestling with great success in the Mid-South area and picking up a number of minor titles. Terry Taylor will be a major force to be reckoned with in wrestling for years to come.

TITO SANTANA

Like many professional wrestlers, Tito Santana began his career in professional sports as a football player. In 1975, after graduating from college, Santana joined the Kansas City Chiefs for one season. In 1976 he played for Vancouver in the Canadian Football League. His football career, however, didn't take off, so he turned to professional wrestling. It was a good choice for Santana and for wrestling fans everywhere.

Tito Santana's early success came as part of a team, first with Ted DiBiase and later with Ivan Putski. Santana briefly teamed with Rick Martel, and within weeks this pair of exciting young scientific, that is to say clean and skillful,



Tito Santana. Photo courtesy Wrestling Press International

wrestlers became the talk of the wrestling world. But this team didn't last, not because of any falling out, but because both men were already heavily committed to other matches.

Santana went on to the WWF, where he began wrestling solo, and it was there that he gained his greatest success. He quickly became the WWF Intercontinental champion, defeating such veterans as the Magnificent Muraco, Paul "Mr. Wonderful" Orndorff and Iron Mike Sharpe.

What amazed many wrestling fans was how quickly the young man from Tocola, Mexico, had learned the craft of wrestling. The giants, like Andre, King Kong Bundy or even Hulk Hogan, are so huge that they can overpower their opponents with massive size and strength. They don't have to know how to wrestle. Bob Backlund and Mike Rotundo had been college wrestling champs. Many other wrestlers such as Barry Windham and the Von Erichs came from long family traditions of wrestling. Tito Santana, who is an average-sized wrestler, had none of these advantages. Yet he quickly learned and mastered virtually every scientific hold imaginable. His agility, speed and aerial maneuvers make him a pleasure to watch. Only his opponents were denied that pleasure. Because of his speed he was dubbed the Tocola Tornado.

The life of a champion wrestler, even one as

skilled and popular as Tito Santana, is a tough one. Everyone is after the belt. Sooner or later someone wears you down. Santana's most persistent pursuer was the tough and experienced Greg Valentine. After a series of matches, Valentine finally captured the belt and in doing so seriously injured Santana's leg. Valentine's figure-four leg lock is one of the most punishing holds in wrestling. The former champion needed surgery to repair his knee, and there were rumors that the damage could never be completely repaired. It was said that Santana's future was in doubt.

The once popular and highly visible Tito Santana practically sank out of public view. When the first WWF Wrestlemania extravaganza was held on March 31, 1985, Tito was at the bottom of the card—the very first match. His opponent was a masked wrestler called the Executioner. Actually there is no single Executioner. Any number of unknown wrestlers have donned the mask and adopted the title. Usually they lose. Santana easily beat the Executioner, but it wasn't much of a match. And most of the people who packed Madison Square Garden for Wrestlemania weren't even in their seats before the match was over. The experience was almost humiliating.

Some of Tito's faithful admirers advised him to get out of the WWF, so he could get more attention and respect. But Tito Santana wanted

that intercontinental title back, and he wanted Greg Valentine. On July 6, 1985 he got both. He beat Valentine in a brutal steel-cage match held in Baltimore, Maryland.

After the match, Santana told reporters, "I've heard all the ugly rumors about the shape of my knees and about the state of my career. Well, perseverance is my middle name." He then did twenty deep-knee bends, just in case anyone was still harboring doubts.

Santana lost his belt to "Macho Man" Randy Savage, but that's the way it is in pro wrestling. This time, however, there were no ugly rumors. No one doubts that Tito Santana will be back again, and that he will remain at or near the top of the wrestling world for a long time.

JERRY "CRUSHER" BLACKWELL

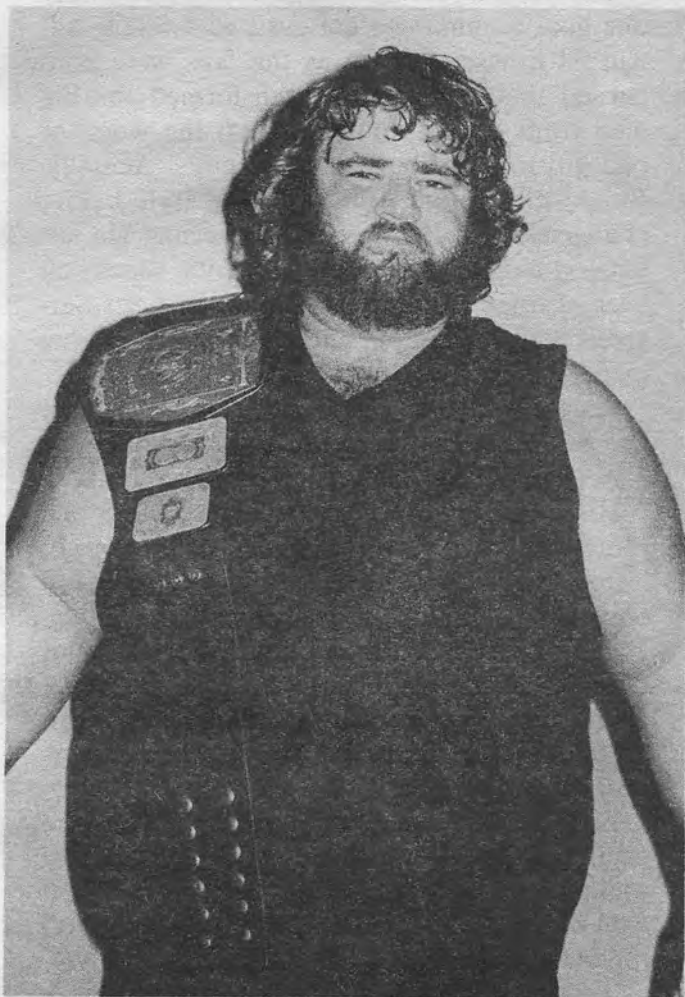
You would figure that a guy who is six feet two inches and weighs an astonishing 470 pounds would have trouble just moving. The amazing thing about Jerry "Crusher" Blackwell is that not only is he able to move fast in the ring, he

can jump. His flying drop kick is one of the best in the business. Watching Blackwell perform this maneuver, when he leaps in the air and plants both feet squarely on his opponent's jaw, is a remarkable experience. It is a bit like watching an elephant dance ballet—and dance well!

Blackwell's other favorite move is the big splash. He jumps in the air and lands on his opponent with his full weight. That's an unbeatable finishing move.

Jerry Blackwell is a surprising guy. A couple of years ago the big man from Stone Mountain, Georgia, provided a surprise when he turned from being one of the most hated men in wrestling to one of the most popular.

Although he has never been able to capture an individual championship belt, Blackwell did have considerable success wrestling as a bad guy. Teamed with strongman Ken Patera, he won the AWA world tag-team championship, and held it for almost a year. When he finally lost the belt, Blackwell's short-tempered manager Sheik Adnan El-Kaissey was enraged. Somehow he seemed to blame Jerry Blackwell for the loss of the belt. He got a couple of other notorious wrestlers, Bruiser Brody and Abdullah the Butcher, to do a number on Blackwell. Blackwell was so badly beaten that he was unable to wrestle for several months after the attack.



Jerry "Crusher" Blackwell. © George Napolitano

But when he did re-enter the ring he had only one goal in mind—to get even with Sheik Adnan El-Kaissey. As far as the fans were concerned that immediately transformed the big man from Stone Mountain from the worst of bad guys to the best of good guys. Actually, Blackwell's rough, rule-breaking style hadn't changed at all. He was just exercising his talents on a different set of opponents. Blackwell even teamed up with all-American hero Sergeant Slaughter in pursuit of the Sheik and his men.

Recently, Blackwell has been on a real tear, and he thinks he deserves a shot at either the NWA or AWA championship belts—or both.

His phone-answering machine at his Stone Mountain home carries this recorded message: "This is Jerry "Crusher" Blackwell, the uncrowned champion of professional wrestling. I'm out wrestling some nobody right now, but if this is Flair [NWA champ] or Hansen [AWA champ], stay where you are. I'll be right over. Your days are numbered and it might just as well be now as later."

Flair and Hansen don't seem to be taking the challenge too seriously yet. Flair calls Blackwell a "human bowling ball." Hansen says he'll fight the mountain man only if he can find a bull rope long enough to wrap around him.

But Jerry "Crusher" Blackwell has come a long way from the days when his only wrestling

move was to fall on his opponent. He's tough, determined and surprisingly skillful. With the fans behind him, he's wrestling better than ever. Blackwell deserves a fair shot at the championship belts.

HILLBILLY JIM

There is a rumor around that pro wrestlers never really get hurt. Don't repeat that to big Hillbilly Jim. The brawny and good-natured country boy entered the WWF ranks late in 1984. He wasn't much of a scientific wrestler, but at a hefty 270 pounds and possessing enormous strength, he didn't have to be. The Hillbilly's bear hug was usually more than enough for his opponents. He could play the guitar and sing, too, thus establishing a wrestling and country music connection to go with the wrestling and rock connection. Then early in 1985 this rising star had his leg broken in a match with Brutus Beefcake. Hillbilly Jim hobbled around in a cast for months, unable to resume his wrestling career.

The WWF, however, was not ready to aban-

don the popular wrestling and country music connection. So it was said that Hillbilly Jim sent back to the hills for his "Uncle Elmer" to come up and help. Actually, Uncle Elmer was a professional wrestler who had already been in the business for about ten years. He was an authentic country boy. (For more about Uncle Elmer's career, see the next chapter.)

That was just the beginning. Soon another big, beefy, overall-clad mountain man appeared. He was called Cousin Junior, and he wore a horseshoe on a rope around his neck. Then came Cousin Luke, who looked so much like Cousin Junior it was hard to tell them apart.

The whole hillbilly clan was publicly humiliated by "Rowdy" Roddy Piper and his gang, during one of Piper's notorious interviews. This naturally led to a feud, and a six-man tag-team match. Jim, now recovered from his broken leg, Uncle Elmer, and one of the cousins took on Piper, Cowboy Bob "Ace" Orton, and part-time wrestler full-time announcer Jessie "The Body" Ventura. It was all broadcast on *Saturday Night's Main Event*. The bad guys won in their usual way—they cheated. But for a bunch of guys who don't know how to wrestle very well, the hillbilly clan gave a very good account of itself.

Hillbilly Jim has had more success teaming with Andre the Giant. They battled into a dou-



Hillbilly Jim.

ble disqualification with Big John Studd and King Kong Bundy.

Many wrestling fans feel that Hillbilly Jim remains an unfinished talent. He has the strength and the size to be a top wrestler. His career was set back by that broken leg, from which he has not yet fully recovered. Does he have the will, the necessary killer instinct to be a top-notch wrestler? Only time will tell. But one thing everyone will agree upon, Hillbilly Jim is the best country singer in the WWF.

UNCLE ELMER

When Hillbilly Jim was injured and out of action for several months in 1985, he said that he sent word back to the farm for Uncle Elmer to join him and defend the wrestling reputation of country boys. Uncle Elmer made quite an impression in his debut in Madison Square Garden. Of course, any man over six feet tall and weighing over 400 pounds is going to make an impression wherever he goes.

Uncle Elmer quickly became an enormous fan favorite in the WWF. He was a real delight

to interview. He got married on the TNT wrestling talk show. That ceremony can only be described as bizarre. But most of all Uncle Elmer proved himself in the ring. Now a wrestler the size of Uncle Elmer is going to be a hard knockdown. Uncle Elmer is no aerialist or speed demon. But he's not just a mountain of flesh either. He can really wrestle. How is it possible that this guy has been hiding down on the farm for so many years?

The truth is that Uncle Elmer hasn't been hiding at all. He's been wrestling for over ten years, under a variety of names. Long-time wrestling fans thought that behind the beard now sported by Uncle Elmer they recognized his face, and in the overalls they certainly recognized the physique of a down-home wrestler who once called himself Plowboy Frazer.

It's not uncommon for wrestlers, entertainers, sports figures, and just ordinary folk to change their names. Hulk Hogan once wrestled as Terry Boulder and was born with the name Terry Bollea. But Uncle Elmer's changes of name have been a bit more elaborate than most.

According to wrestling legend, Plowboy Frazer was discovered by the wrestler Jerry Lawler and his manager while they were driving through southern Mississippi in 1974. They saw a 400-pound-plus man pulling a plow. Apparently the mule had broken down. Lawler and his manager immediately recognized the

potential of this giant, and signed him up on the spot.

For the next several years, Plowboy Frazer wrestled throughout the South, often as Lawler's tag-team partner. He started as a rule breaker and wound up a fan favorite.

After breaking with Lawler, Plowboy soon fell under the influence of manager Jimmy "The Mouth of the South" Hart. He emerged with war paint on his face and wrestled under the title Kamala II, a sort of rerun of the notorious Kamala the Ugandan Giant. That didn't catch on. Next he wore a mask and took the title the Lone Ranger. That didn't work either. So he put on a tuxedo and some gaudy jewelry and used the name Playboy Frazer. The fans didn't respond to that at all.

So when Hillbilly Jim began looking for another big country boy, it was Plowboy who answered the call, this time under the name Uncle Elmer. As Uncle Elmer, this amiable giant (amiable outside of the ring, that is) seems to have finally made the impact that he has long sought. Hopefully, Uncle Elmer will be around for a while.

GREG GAGNE

The only thing that has kept Greg Gagne from being one of the world's top wrestlers is his size. Gagne's not a small man, but in a world generally dominated by 300-pound-plus superstars, Greg Gagne, who's not even 200 pounds, is definitely outweighed. But he's got just about everything else going for him—strength, skill, determination, brains and very significantly, wrestling tradition.

There is probably no other sport in the world in which family tradition plays so large a role as in wrestling. There is, for example, the Von Erich clan, Blackjack Mulligan and his son Barry Windham, the Valient brothers and the father and son Valentines, just to name a few. Greg Gagne's father Verne was one of the true wrestling greats. Verne Gagne held the AWA wrestling title for the better part of twenty years. Verne Gagne was the greatest of the scientific wrestlers, and though he was also a relatively small man, he used his superb skills to defeat the best of his day. After he retired from

the ring, Verne Gagne went on to become the greatest teacher of pro wrestlers in the world. Among his students are Ric Flair, Bob Backlund, Ken Patera and Rick Steamboat. Verne Gagne is also one of the most powerful wrestling promoters in America. His promotional activities center in his native Minnesota and the Midwest, but Gagne-promoted wrestling cards can now be seen on television throughout the country. Not long ago Verne Gagne even re-entered the ranks of active wrestlers, at least briefly. So wrestling is very definitely a Gagne family tradition.

But the wrestling picture has changed a lot since the days of Verne Gagne's glory. One of the changes is that the wrestlers have simply gotten bigger, and this has been a real problem for Verne Gagne's son Greg.

But let's not sound too negative here. Greg Gagne has had enormous success in his years as a wrestler. He has been particularly successful when teamed with Jim Bruzell. That pair captured the AWA world tag-team championship twice. Bruzell's defection to another wrestling group came as a blow to Gagne, and forced him to wrestle more frequently on his own. He has had great success as a solo wrestler.

Greg Gagne had always emulated his father, a no-frills, no-nonsense type of wrestler. But in 1985 Greg picked up a new teacher, the popular

and colorful Sergeant Slaughter. Under Sarge's direction, young Gagne became tougher and meaner—he's no rulebreaker—but he now seems more intent on punishing his opponents.

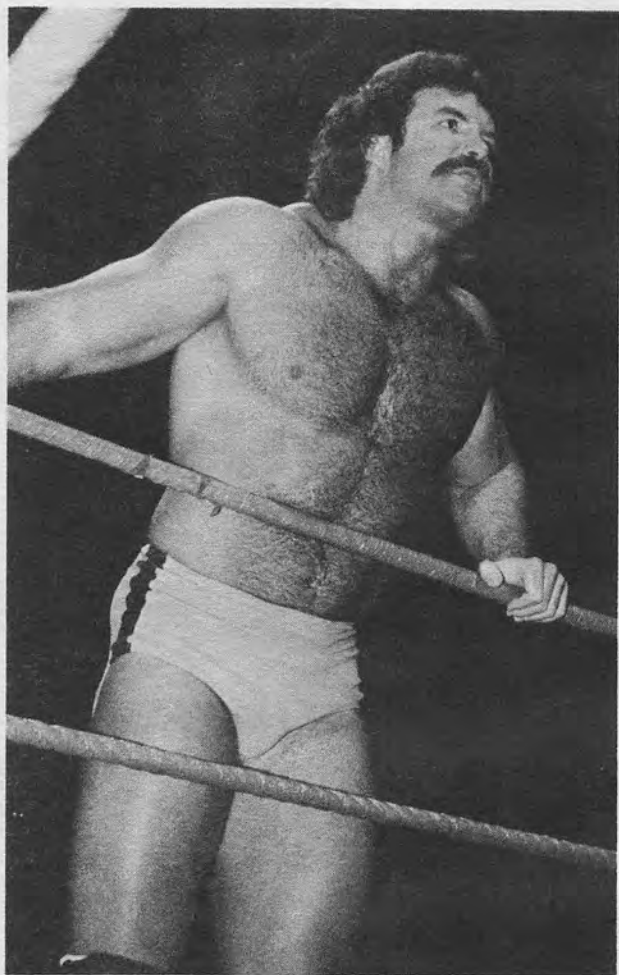
Under Sarge's military influence, Gagne has taken to wearing an outfit made of military camouflage cloth. The ripped shirt exposed a bare midriff, and he got some kidding for his "Madonna look." But there's no kidding about Gagne when he wrestles.

The real future for Greg Gagne may be as a wrestling announcer, rather than in the ring. When he gets behind the microphone he is one of the most intelligent and articulate of wrestling announcers. And behind the mike you don't have to weigh 300 pounds.

SCOTT HALL

They call him Big Scott Hall, and for good reason. He *is* big. He's six feet eight inches and weighs nearly 300 pounds, which makes him nearly as big as Hulk Hogan, and Scott Hall's a lot younger than the Hulkster. He may still be growing.

Unlike some of wrestling's giants, such as



Big Scott Hall. © Paul Heyman

Andre and King Kong Bundy, there's not an ounce of fat on Scott Hall. He's all muscle, but he's not just a muscle man, content to strike poses in the ring and rely on brute strength. Scott Hall has been learning his craft as a wrestler. He's not just a one-dimensional fighter. He has the strength and he's rapidly acquiring the skills to match. Small wonder that an awful lot of wrestling experts and ordinary fans are very excited about this promising new talent. Promoters look at the charismatic young man and see visions of packed arenas. That starts visions of dollar signs dancing in their heads. Scott Hall has been tagged as one of wrestling's brightest new stars.

When Hall started in the wrestling business he tried to make a big impression all at once. He began wrestling under the name Starship Coyote, in the Central States region. He quickly gained the reputation of a brawling rule breaker. Hall had to be a brawler, because he didn't really know how to wrestle yet.

But the rule-breaker role wasn't natural to Hall. The fans didn't much care for it either. So he began learning the moves and made the transition from rule breaker to scientific wrestler. Then his career really started to take off. Not only has he won many individual matches, he's been impressive in battle royals, those free-for-alls when all the wrestlers on the card climb into the ring at one time and try to throw one an-

other out. The last man in the ring is declared the winner. The biggest man usually has the advantage, and because of his size and strength Hall has won more than his share of these contests.

Recently, Hall has teamed up with a more experienced wrestler, Curt Henning, to form an exceptionally successful tag team. Until recently, they were the holders of the AWA tag-team championship, and generally considered one of the four or five best active tag teams today. They are, in the view of some wrestling observers, a perfect blend of style and substance.

The seasoned Henning supplies the style. Actually, Henning is experienced beyond his years, for he comes from a wrestling family. His father was Larry "The Axe" Henning. Big Scott Hall supplies the strength and endurance.

"I'm a big guy," said Hall. "Sometimes it's tough for me to get my body to do what I want it to do in the ring. It's easy to get frustrated, to get angry, and to let my emotions take over. But when that happens I'm sunk. Curt helps me by showing me that I can remain in control of myself, no matter what happens or doesn't happen in the ring. It sounds simple, but it's really, really tough."

For a lot of wrestlers, a major tag-team championship would be the high point of a career. For Big Scott Hall, it looks like a starting point.

BARON VON RASCHKE

You might figure that a guy who started his wrestling career in America goose-stepping around the ring wrapped in a Nazi flag would never become a fan favorite. But remember that in professional wrestling strange things can and always do happen. It's also strange that a guy who looks like an aging Mr. Clean would find his image on T-shirts, coffee mugs and all sorts of souvenirs.

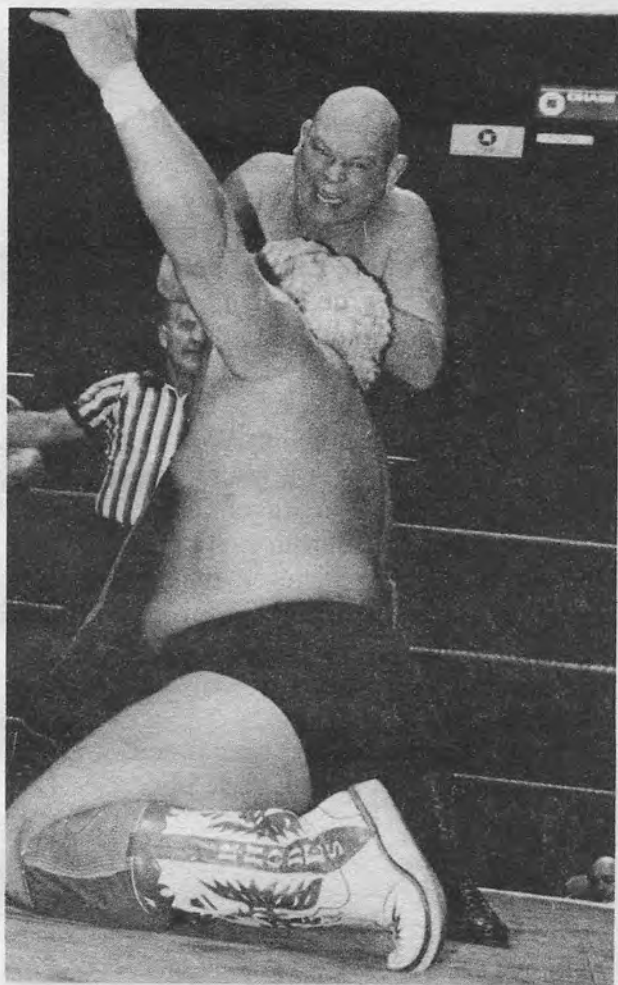
The man whose career has made this remarkable turnabout is the claw master himself—Baron Von Raschke. In recent years Von Raschke has been one of the most popular wrestlers in the American Wrestling Association. He's rarely a headliner today and often he wrestles as part of a tag team with flashier big-name wrestlers. In interviews he's almost invariably the quieter of the pair. Yet Von Raschke has consistently ranked high on any list of best-liked wrestlers. Can you imagine getting a Baron Von Raschke doll for Christmas this year? It could happen.

It certainly wasn't that way when he started. The goose-stepping Baron had notable battles with such all-time greats as Bruno Sammartino and Verne Gagne. Lots of wrestlers have changed from bad guy to good guy (and vice versa). The wrestling fans tend to be a forgiving lot when a former bad guy determines to change his ways. But the Nazi business is a hard one to live down.

The Baron says that the Nazis were around when he was a child and that members of his family had joined the Nazi party. He said, "We weren't programmed to think for ourselves." He also found that the swastika was a potent symbol for intimidation. Success in wrestling is only partially due to physical abilities. The mental state of a wrestler is extremely important, and if one wrestler can intimidate and disconcert his opponent, he has a big edge for winning the match. Von Raschke found his Nazi image to be very intimidating indeed. Some of his opponents would get so angry that they would make serious mistakes in the ring.

The Baron has given up the Nazi image now, but he still uses the goose step on occasion. That's not part of any image, he insists, it's merely a way of psyching himself up. "Although the crowd gets excited by it, it's not supposed to be a crowd pleaser."

The Baron can still be very intimidating, particularly when he's ready to put his feared claw



Baron Von Raschke "claws" Dusty Rhodes. © Paul Heyman

hold on an opponent's face. Lots of wrestlers have tried to imitate the claw because it looks simple, but no one does it better than the Baron. It's said that in the bad old days the Baron's claw hold forced the premature retirement of nearly a dozen wrestlers. Today he generally uses the hold to win a match, but not to permanently injure an opponent.

He says that his quiet, almost unassuming personality (when out of the ring, that is) is sort of a payment for his past viciousness.

Baron Von Raschke also has a sense of humor. In 1985 the popular AWA champ Rick Martel showed up with a blonde valet calling "herself" Bertha Von Raschke. At first the Baron insisted that Bertha was his sister from Dusseldorf. No one believed that. A reporter for *Sports Review Wrestling* put it to the Baron bluntly:

"We all know that Bertha was you in a dime-store wig."

The indignant Baron responded, "Dime store? That wig set Martel back \$49."

VILLAINS

“MACHO MAN” RANDY SAVAGE

“Macho Man” Randy Savage looks and sounds like a bit of a flake. When he looks at you he gives the impression that he is not looking at you but at something out there in space. His voice sounds disconnected and in a world of its own. Savage’s statements don’t seem to have any real beginning or end. (“Machomania is going to go on and on into the twenty-first century and beyond—yeah. . . .”)

He doesn’t shout and bellow like many other wrestlers. His voice is rather soft, and it seems to come out of some other dimension. So does most of what he says.

The Macho Man’s wardrobe is also a bit flaky—his robes look like they were made by Liberace’s tailor. His sequined headbands put those of Chicago Bear’s quarterback Jim McMahon to shame.

But once Randy Savage steps into the ring and takes off his robe, all those flaky impressions vanish. He is truly awesome. There is not

an ounce of fat on that magnificently muscled body. His wrestling style is best described by his name—savage. There is nothing subtle or fancy about it, though he is surprisingly agile for such a big man. Mostly he just pounds his opponents into the mat with his great strength. He's a rule breaker—but he would win matches if he played by the rules—because he's so strong.

The Macho Man comes by his skills through family tradition. His father, Angelo Poffo, was a tough professional wrestler. In case that last name sounds familiar, it should. Another of Angelo Poffo's sons is "Leapin" Lanny Poffo. This information comes as something of a surprise to new wrestling fans, for the World Wrestling Federation, where both brothers are currently campaigning, has chosen to downplay or simply ignore this fact. But it wasn't a secret in the past. The two men have often posed together with their father. In such photos you can see a family resemblance. Their father brags about them both, loudly and often. Granted, they are very different sorts of wrestlers. Lanny Poffo is more acrobatic and cleaner than the bigger, stronger Randy. They have even wrestled one another to determine who was the better wrestler. The results were inconclusive.

Lanny Poffo is known as the poet laureate of wrestling. Brother Randy has also been known



"Macho Man" Randy Savage and Elizabeth.

to speak a few verses. The following is an example:

"I'll joust you with hustle and oust you with muscle; I'll tear you to shreds and leave you for dead; In this land I'm head honcho; Get on your knees to Macho."

Okay, so it doesn't quite rhyme—but the spirit comes through.

When Savage moved from the Mid-South area to the WWF, his fame rose quickly. The promotion-minded WWF recognized immediately that Randy Savage was not only a superb wrestler but a highly promotable guy as well. He had star quality. Randy Savage became one of the most popular guests on Vince McMahon's TNT wrestling talk show. And in less than a year he had a title match with Hulk Hogan. He didn't defeat the Hulkster, but this hasn't ended his career. He's still out there plotting another assault on the champ.

Then there is the matter of Miss Elizabeth. Some wrestlers have managers—usually male. Others have "valets"—mostly female. In 1985 "Macho Man" Randy Savage picked the unknown, but very beautiful Miss Elizabeth as his manager. As far as we can determine, he was the first male wrestler to have a female manager. Others have followed. But does Miss Elizabeth really manage? That's one of the questions often asked by wrestling fans. She simply stands around at matches and looks

concerned. She never utters a word in interviews. And the Macho Man is always ordering her around, and on at least one occasion he has flung her over his shoulder and carried her from the auditorium. If Miss Elizabeth objects to this sort of treatment, she certainly has never complained, and she seems remarkably loyal to the Macho Man. But sometimes she does look rather forlorn, and some wrestling commentators have complained about her treatment. Her apparent plight also seems to have aroused the protective instincts of George "The Animal" Steele, who has made it his business not only to take Miss Elizabeth away from Savage, but to batter Savage into the ground.

Finally, will the Macho Man, an arrogant rule breaker, one day turn good guy? Some knowledgeable observers of the wrestling scene think so. Although Savage is usually booed as he enters the ring, and seems to thrive on the jeers of fans, he also has a solid hard core of supporters. One day he might be overcome by a desire to hear the cheers. Savage has a long rule breaking past, so it's difficult to imagine that he would change. But miraculous transformations like this have happened before in wrestling.

STAN "THE LARIAT" HANSEN

Stan Hansen is an old-fashioned type of wrestler. He's been a professional wrestler for years, and one of the top for at least a decade. There are no gimmicks about him, unless you count the bull rope and bell that he carries to his matches. He's no pretty boy—his prominent nose shows the effects of years of pounding. He's no bodybuilder either. There is no sculptured, artificial look to his physique. It's not the result of years of lifting weights. It's the physique of a man who has spent his days eating in diners as he's traveled the country and his nights taking on all comers in the ring. He doesn't need face paint or a funny haircut to make him look mean. He looks naturally mean. He is naturally mean.

Stan Hansen, the bad man from Borger, Texas, first came to the attention of the wrestling world in 1976 when wrestler/manager Classy Freddie Blassie hired him as a personal bodyguard and enforcer. Since then Hansen has roamed the country picking up titles wher-



Stan "the Lariat" Hansen. © Paul Heyman

ever he went. His most recent coup was taking the AWA title from popular champion Rick Martel. Before that Hansen's greatest claim to fame was that he had seriously injured Bruno Sammartino, generally acknowledged to be one of the greatest wrestlers of all time. It is said that Hansen carries around X-rays of the opponents whose bones he has broken. The durable Hansen defended his newly won AWA title against Bruno's son, David Sammartino. Although young Sammartino gave the big Texan a tough battle, Hansen's size, years of ring expe-

rience and determined meanness won out in the end. Hansen recently lost the title in a much disputed match with Nick Bockwinkel.

Stan Hansen is one of the best blusterers in the business. He bellows challenges and threats in his loud, hoarse voice. He grimaces and points his finger and shakes his fist. At times he seems completely out of control, and he has developed a reputation of being one of wrestling's madmen. But there's a method to his madness. All the bluster tends to intimidate opponents, and to bring fans—all hoping to see the braggart crushed—into the arena. The larger the crowd the bigger Hansen's paycheck. Beneath the hot words, there's an icy calculation, and behind his "maniac" front is a wrestler fully in control of his business.

Aside from screaming abuse at his opponents during interviews, Hansen doesn't talk much to the wrestling press. He doesn't like them very much. He doesn't have many friends, or even acquaintances in wrestling. Sure everybody knows who Stan Hansen is, but very few would claim to really know him. Hansen seems to like it that way.

One of Hansen's ex-tag-team partners, Ole Anderson, said that he is basically a loner: "He cherishes solitude. He'll sit in those Holiday Inns all night listening to his old country tapes—he lugs a case around of the old stuff,

Hank and Lefty Frizzell and old honky-tonk stuff like that—and just sit there going over scouting reports.”

Yes, Stan Hansen is an old-fashioned type of wrestler, and that's just the way he likes it.

KING KONG BUNDY

We will make a bold and perhaps rash prediction. One day King Kong Bundy will be a fan favorite. Now we realize it seems incredible that this 450-pound monster, this arrogant and remorseless bad guy who nearly crippled Hulk Hogan in a sneak attack seen on national television, would ever be more than one of the most hated men in the wrestling world. Yet there is something about Bundy that is strangely appealing. Behind the sneer, the big man has intelligence, wit and charm—that's right, charm. He is more than a fat, bellowing bully.

Bundy was working as a bouncer in a bar in his native Atlantic City, New Jersey, when he was discovered by wrestling manager Gary Hart. Hart was causing trouble in the bar, and Bundy picked him up and threw him out. Hart

immediately recognized the giant's talent and signed him up. Bundy began wrestling professionally in 1981 under the name "Boom Boom" Bundy. He won his first match in 47 seconds, breaking three of his opponents' ribs with his notorious big splash. It's not a fancy move. Bundy simply jumps in the air and flops down on his opponent. Other big men like Jerry Blackwell use the same move.

Early in his career the big man began two practices that were to become his calling cards. He offered \$15,000 to anyone who could body slam him, and he insisted on a five count from the referee rather than the usual three count when he pinned his opponent. Bundy has been body slammed, though not very often. Because of the five count he has probably lost a couple of matches that he might otherwise have won. Yet he has so much confidence in his ability and his size that he sticks to these two unusual practices. The body-slam challenge, by the way, applies not only to wrestlers, but to anyone in the audience. If you need a quick \$15,000, you might think about trying to slam the big guy. It's no easy task. Hulk Hogan has body slammed Bundy, but very few others have been able to do it.

Bundy has been engaged in a series of notable feuds. He became enraged when Paul Ellering, manager of the championship team the Road Warriors, referred to him as "420 pounds



King Kong Bundy roars after his sneak attack on Hulk Hogan. Manager Bobby "the Brain" Heenan is at right.

of Jell-O." (Bundy was thirty pounds lighter then.) He teamed up with a number of different partners in a long series of matches with the Road Warriors. Bundy was never able to gain the sort of decisive victory he wanted.

Bundy's feud with Andre the Giant seemed inevitable. Like many other really big men in wrestling, Bundy resents Andre's claim that he

is the only true giant in wrestling. During a match between Andre and Big John Studd, Bundy rushed into the ring and injured Andre with a series of big splashes. Bundy pulled the same sort of maneuver during a match between the Magnificent Muraco and Hulk Hogan. Bundy jumped into the ring and hit Hogan with a series of Atlantic City avalanches and big splashes. In the Atlantic City avalanche, Bundy gets his opponent into a corner of the ring and runs into him. Hogan had to be carried from the ring directly to the hospital. The whole incident was aired on March 1, 1986 on NBC's *Saturday Night's Main Event*. This naturally led to a rematch in the grand spectacular Wrestlemania 2 on April 7. Hogan won this time, but Bundy remains defiant.

During the hype and publicity that surrounded Wrestlemania 2, King Kong Bundy appeared on many TV interview shows. These weren't the usual wrestling interviews where one guy tries to outshout and outthreaten the other. Bundy got a chance to show another side. He was intelligent and funny. That's why we predict that someday soon he will be a fan favorite. Don't forget, the Hulkster himself was once a bad guy.

BRUISER BRODY

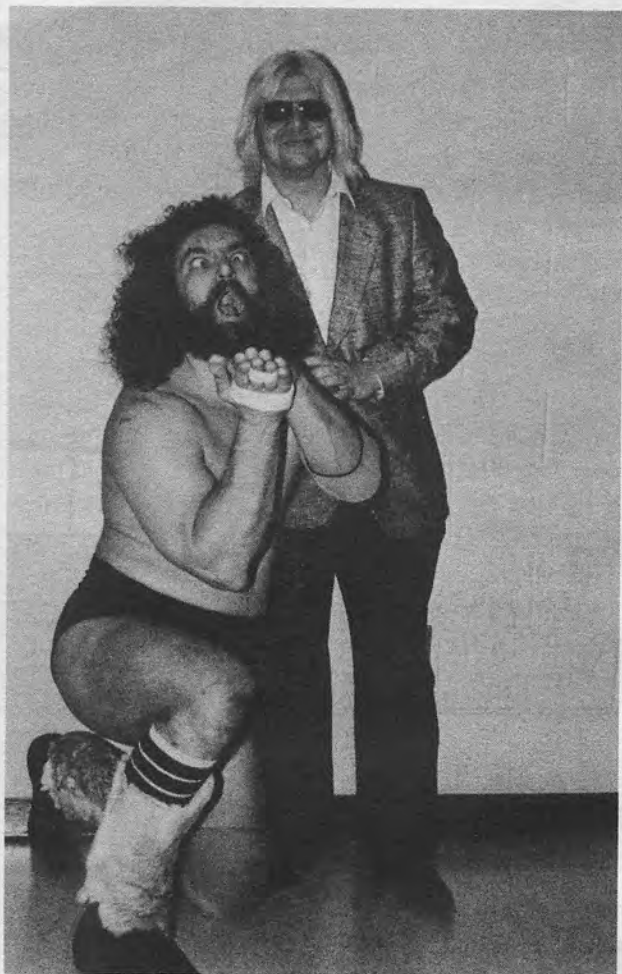
There is nobody in wrestling today who is more frightening, more intimidating than Bruiser Brody. He's big—no, he's huge—standing around six feet eight inches and weighing in the neighborhood of 320 pounds. The wild hair and bushy beard add to the impression of size. He's strong and he has easily tossed even bigger men like One Man Gang around the ring. In addition to his enormous size and power, he's also a smart wrestler. He's got years of ring experience behind him, and he knows all the holds. No one's going to surprise the Bruiser.

However, the most frightening and intimidating fact about Brody is that he's nuts, at least that's the impression he gives when he wrestles. In the ring, Brody seems almost possessed. The madness isn't confined to the match either. He enters the arena screaming and sneering defiance at the fans—usually hostile fans. After the match he will sometimes stalk the arena, dragging a chair behind him threatening anyone who approaches. Brody

may be hated by every fan in the arena, but no one will dare go near the big man. They have to be content with shouting abuse at the Bruiser from a distance. At such moments, and there are lots of them, Brody seems to be a wild animal or an unexploded bomb. It's dangerous to get too close.

In some ways Brody is an oddity in the wrestling world. He has often claimed, "No one can beat me." And in that boast he has been proved pretty nearly correct. He's clearly title material, and he's won a few belts, but in order to take and hold a title a wrestler must stay in one area for a while, working his way up to a championship match and then defeating the contenders. Brody is too restless for that. He roams the United States and the world, never wrestling in one area for long. Besides, his wild and unpredictable style leads to as many disqualifications as victories. You can't win a title if you're disqualified.

Brody has a well-deserved reputation as a mercenary. If a particular wrestler, manager or promoter has some enemies, he simply hires Brody to take care of them—in the ring, of course. Under conditions like that, Brody doesn't have to win a match, he simply has to punish his opponents to get the point across. Brody is unquestionably a notorious rule breaker—a mild word in the Bruiser's case—because rules don't even exist in Bruiser



Bruiser Brody in a rare light moment with sometime manager Pretty Boy Larry Sharpe. © Paul Heyman

Brody's matches. However, he's sometimes been enlisted by the good guys to get their enemies. Not long ago he allied himself with the popular Von Erichs in Texas, and there the fans cheered his appearance. Actually, Brody is an old protégé of Von Erich-clan patriarch Fritz Von Erich.

"Bruiser Brody and I go way back," said Fritz. "I trained him many years ago and now he's repaying that debt."

But Von Erich knows better than most that Bruiser Brody is an unreliable and unstable ally. Just a few years ago he was the bitter enemy of the Von Erich clan.

Brody's former manager and former friend Gary Hart also knows Brody's unreliability. He said, "The man has no conscience. He has no morals. His mother once asked him to come to visit her on her 75th birthday and he agreed to it only after she met his appearance fee."

In a recent tag-team match, Brody turned on his own partner—after they had won. You've probably heard the old saying, "With friends like that, you don't need any enemies." It was a saying made for the likes of Bruiser Brody.

What does Brody himself think about all the charges that have been leveled against him? They don't bother him a bit. He said he doesn't care about titles, or friendship: "All I want is the money."

What about his reputation as an uncontrollable wild man? "I'm a maniac only to my enemies," he said.

The Bruiser undoubtedly enjoys his terrible reputation, for it helps to sustain him as one of the most deadly forces in pro wrestling today.

RAVISHING RICK RUDE

What's in a name? asked Romeo.

Quite a lot, according to one of wrestling's newest stars, Ravishing Rick Rude. His name was originally spelled Rood, and he hated it. He said, "That ugly, guttural 'Rood' is 'door' spelled backwards—and that's exactly where my career was going before I changed my name, backwards out the door leading to fame, money and brilliance."

The new spelling was just the beginning. He then added the word ravishing. "I use it as a noun, adjective, adverb, whatever. My life is an action verb and RAVISHING can be any part of speech I choose," Rude explained. In fact, he legally changed his name to RAVISHING RICK RUDE (he always uses all capital let-

ters). That's the name on his driver's license, bank accounts and, according to Rude, "fat payment checks."

From what he has tried to do with his name, you might get the impression that Rude is cocky, possibly arrogant, maybe even a bit of an egomaniac. The impression would be absolutely correct. But a big ego is necessary for a successful wrestler. You just have to think that you're the best every time you step into the ring. If you didn't feel that way, you wouldn't be able to survive for very long.

Rude styles himself as "wrestling's sexiest superstar." He will tell anyone who will listen, and many who don't want to hear, that he is wrestling's newest and brightest star—destined to be a great champion. That sort of talk is to be expected from the man himself. But many knowledgeable observers of the wrestling scene agree with Rude's own glowing assessment—with one reservation.

"Never did we doubt that Rude had the fiber of champions," stated an article in the publication *Inside Wrestling*. This was said when Rude had only been wrestling for about two years. Most wrestling insiders like to see a guy take his lumps for at least a half-dozen years before taking him too seriously. But Rude is not only a skillful grappler—he has already copped several titles in his brief career—he also has that star quality outside of the ring. Actually, he's

more experienced than his brief pro career indicates. He was a top amateur wrestler; and he got his pro training from Verne Gagne.

Sure Rude is an arrogant rule breaker who usually makes the list of most hated wrestlers. But there's a charm about the fellow, which has won him a large body of fans. It wouldn't take too much of a change to move him from the most hated to the most popular list.

But there's that one reservation that we mentioned. Ravishing Rick Rude may be just a little too erratic. There's a lot of hype and showmanship in pro wrestling. But in the end, discipline and training win the matches. Rude has not been particularly careful in his choice of managers. Currently, he is managed by Percy Pringle, a loudmouth—though that's practically a requirement for being a wrestling manager. Pringle's antics have cost Rude a couple of important matches, and this particular partnership may not last much longer.

Then there is the problem of living too excessively. Rude likes to party, and he takes his self-proclaimed title of wrestling's sexiest superstar quite seriously. But you can't stay out until three in the morning and then travel eight hours and wrestle the following night. A fellow as strong as Rude and with his natural ability may be able to mix wrestling and the high life for a few years, but eventually it takes its toll.

"Today's superstars become tomorrow's

window washers," warned *Inside Wrestling*. A wrestler can't live the good life and last long.

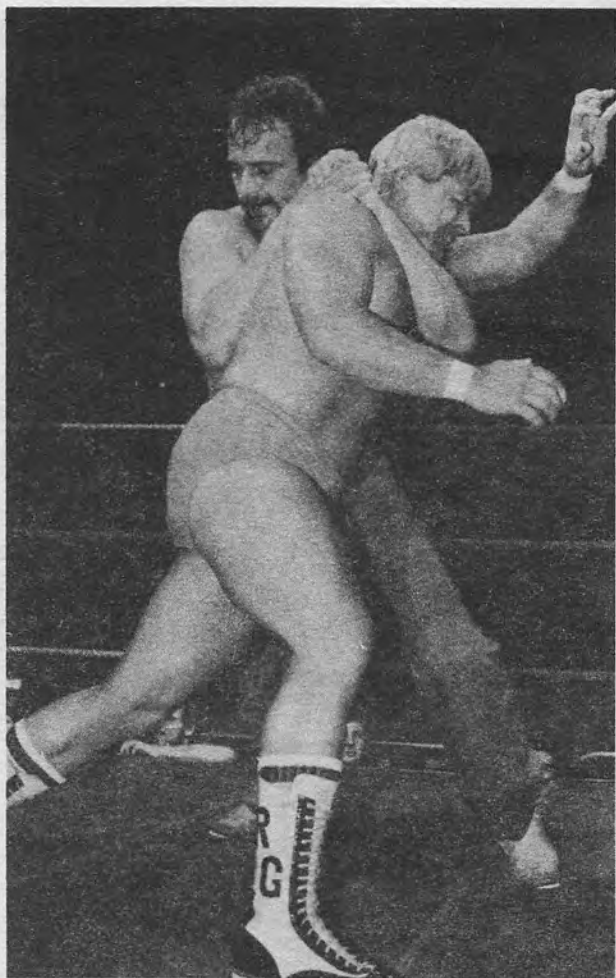
There is some indication that Rude is beginning to pay more attention to his wrestling future, and though he won't admit it, he's cut down on the late nights to concentrate on training. If that's the case, then RAVISHING RICK RUDE is going to be RAVISHING for quite some time.

JAKE "THE SNAKE" ROBERTS

The Snake seemed to be shedding his skin. After years as one of the most hated men in wrestling, Jake "the Snake" Roberts was on the verge of becoming a fan favorite.

Jake Roberts is one of those really tough, adaptable wrestlers who's been around for about a decade. He's traveled the world and wrestled just about everybody. No one scares him; nothing surprises him. "You don't survive in this business without half a gallon of guts and resources," he said.

In the world of pro wrestling, partnerships and friendships form quickly and dissolve even



Jake "the Snake" Roberts in action. © Paul Heyman

more quickly into deadly hatreds. That's happened repeatedly throughout Robert's career. In late 1985, the Snake's career underwent a particularly abrupt turnabout.

The Snake was successfully teamed with a powerful young man who wrestled under the name the Barbarian. The Snake was not merely the Barbarian's team partner but his friend and to a great extent his teacher. "I taught him 90 percent of what he knows in the ring," said Roberts.

The pair was extremely successful and finally got a match with Mid-South tag-team champs Steve Willias and Ted DiBiase. DiBiase, incidentally, was a former close friend of Roberts's. Now the best thing Roberts said about his old buddy was, "I'll stop short of crippling him forever. I don't want to put him out of wrestling forever. I just want to teach him a painful lesson. . . ."

The Snake's pursuit of DiBiase, who is even more widely hated, made him something of a fan favorite. Then came a match with a masked man who wrestles under the name the Nightmare. Jake did a number on the Nightmare and unmasked him—a great humiliation in wrestling. At ringside was the Nightmare's manager, Sir Oliver Humperdink, and his stablemate, another masked wrestler called Lord Hungous. They both jumped into the ring and began beating up Jake. We hope you are

following this so far, because now it becomes really confusing. At this point, for no known reason, Jake's partner and pupil the Barbarian rushed out of his seat, not to help his friend, but to join the attack! Next a bunch of fan favorites, mostly old enemies of the Snake, appeared to save him. What a turnabout!

Suddenly, and because of this rather surprising turn of events, Jake "the Snake" Roberts has become a fan favorite. How long his new-found popularity will last is hard to say, because the Snake does not seem to have really changed his skin. Still he is talking a bit more kindly about the fans, and he does seem to enjoy the cheers. But what he enjoys most of all is revenge.

"Cheers are good when you get 'em, but once you start looking forward to 'em or banking on them, then you'll find yourself in trouble. . . . Back when the crowd booed me, that got me going, too. I guess I just like a lot of noise," Roberts said.

Why did the Barbarian suddenly turn on him?

"I don't know. Who can read the mind of a savage? Jealousy, maybe. Being my partner, he saw up close and personal how the fans began cheering me in our matches. Maybe he was jealous of the cheers. Maybe Humperdink paid him a bundle to do it. I don't know and frankly I really don't care," Roberts explained.

The Snake possesses one of the most devastating finishing maneuvers in pro wrestling. He contends it's the only true finishing maneuver in wrestling. It's called the DDT. He never taught it to the Barbarian. ("Teach the Barbarian the DDT? Ha! I wouldn't teach my mother the DDT.") Besides, said Jake, it's a move that really can't be taught. "It's an inborn ability."

Said the Snake, "I'm just like my DDT—cruel but fair!"

Recently the Snake has switched to the WWF, and resumed his old evil ways. In fact, he has become more evil than ever. He now carries a live snake into the ring with him.

Which way will Jake "the Snake" Roberts finally slither? There is no way to tell.

LEX LUGAR

When young Lawrence Lugar was growing up, he was a self-described "comic-book freak." The comic book he liked most was *Superman*. Although he admired the man of steel's physique and strength, he couldn't figure out why he spent so much time "acting like a turkey named Clark Kent."

The boy came to admire one of Superman's main opponents, the evil Lex Luthor. "He was a man who had his priorities straight. If he hadn't been a bald-headed scientist, I expect he'd have been a big hit with the women," Lugar said.

So Lawrence Lugar became Lex Lugar.

Lex graduated from the University of Miami in Florida where he swears he majored in "suntanning." But he must have been doing something else, for he then signed on with the Green Bay Packers. He played pro football for several successful seasons, but he gave it up to become a wrestler because football had "too many rules."

As you might guess, when Lugar entered wrestling it was as an arrogant and brutal rule breaker. He portrays himself as a man who likes to party and hurt people. Although Lugar often plays down the hard-working side of his life, Lex Lugar is a fanatic on training. Lugar has placed himself under the direction of Hiro Matsuda, a former wrestler and now a highly respected trainer. Matsuda insists that Lugar is one of the most dedicated wrestlers he has ever seen, and absolutely the best prospect for future stardom among young wrestlers today.

Lugar tries to psych out his opponents with boasts of his power and ferocity. He cultivates a sneer, and he's often seen in the company of arch-villain Kevin Sullivan. Lugar insists that



Lex Luger. © George Napolitano

he is far too much of an individualist to fall under the evil Sullivan's spell. He may be one of those wrestlers who uses Sullivan's reputation to further his own career.

Lugar's goal is a world championship and nothing less. He has complete confidence that the goal is within reach. "I am only now gaining the international recognition I deserve. I am a versatile athlete, and spent several years playing pro football. I'm now emerging as a top contender among world-class wrestlers, but as I said, I'm still young, and the future lies ahead," Lugar predicted.

Lex Lugar does not lack confidence. Of course, the kind of bravado he expresses is common enough in wrestling, where big egos and big mouths are just as much a part of the game as big muscles. Lugar, however, may have the power and skills to back up the boasts. He has already beaten some notable opponents, and there are a lot of observers of wrestling who don't like Lex Lugar one little bit, but who are forced to admit that the muscular young man with the comic-book name may just be almost as good as he says he is.

GORGEOUS JIM GARVIN

Gorgeous Jim Garvin comes from one of wrestling's famous families. Two of his brothers were also wrestlers. Terry Garvin is no longer active in the ring, but he is a well-known wrestling promoter. Another brother, Ronnie, is active and successful, but very different from brother Jim. Ronnie Garvin is a popular scientific wrestler. Gorgeous Jim is a colorful and egotistical rule breaker. Actually, Jim says he's not a rule breaker, just more aggressive than most other wrestlers. If aggressiveness means bringing brass knuckles into the ring, then he's right. Jim and his brother do not see eye to eye, and never have.

"We made Cain and Abel look like Franklin and Eleanor [Roosevelt]," said Jim Garvin.

The brothers have currently patched up, or really papered over their differences. In 1985 they even briefly wrestled together as a team. But it won't last—they are too different. Most wrestling experts count Gorgeous Jim the better and smarter of the brothers.



Left to right: Steve Regal, Ronnie Garvin, Precious and Gorgeous Jimmy Garvin. © Paul Heyman

Florida-born Jim Garvin began his wrestling career respectably enough. He was skillful, strong and fast. There were no gimmicks, no hype, and he was enormously popular. Jim Garvin's future looked bright. But as often happens in wrestling, Garvin fell under the influence of a manager and adviser who pumped up his ego and tried to mold him into a wrestling personality. The man responsible for the change in Garvin was J. J. Dillon. Under Dillon's supervision, he took the name Gorgeous, began wearing sequined robes and other flashy outfits and was attended by a series of beautiful valets. His

present valet, a woman called Precious, has become quite a ring personality in her own right, and she sometimes threatens to outshine the Gorgeous One himself. The new Jim Garvin also forgot about most of the rules of wrestling. But he did not forget how to wrestle, and unlike many others who have become hypnotized by their own success, Garvin has not let himself go to pot. For all the flash, glitz and hype, he remains one tough and skillful wrestler.

Garvin was dogged in his pursuit of AWA champ Rick Martel. In fact, he actually beat Martel on several occasions, but his victories were overturned because of allegations that he had brought brass knuckles or other foreign objects into the ring.

"It doesn't take a wise man to figure out what's going on. It's a conspiracy," grumbled Garvin.

Garvin teamed up with Steve Regal, and the pair won the AWA tag-team championship, only to lose it a few months later to the rising young team of Scott Hall and Curt Henning in a memorably grueling match. Garvin and Regal split, and both left the AWA. Regal, who was seriously injured in the match, seems to have dropped out of sight, but not Gorgeous Jim Garvin. He's still out there and itching to climb back to the top any way he can.

"I'm a legendary wrestler," said Garvin. "They're all jealous of me because I'm the

greatest-looking wrestler alive today. I'm also the greatest wrestler around and I have a beautiful lady by my side when I beat everybody up."

Without a doubt, Gorgeous Jim Garvin is going to be around for a long time to come.

LARRY ZBYSZKO

Do you want to know what turns a good guy into a bad guy in wrestling? It's anger, jealousy and frustration. Take the case of Larry Zbyszko. Right now Zbyszko would probably rank pretty high on any list of most hated wrestlers. But it wasn't always that way.

Zbyszko began his wrestling career in 1972 as the protégé of Bruno Sammartino, WWF heavyweight champ, wrestling's "living legend" and one of the most popular wrestlers of all times. The wrestling public regarded young Larry Zbyszko as practically Bruno's adopted son—and Bruno himself seemed to feel that way.

That's a tough spot for a young man to be in. For a while the skillful and agile Zbyszko

played the part. He successfully wrestled many of the older man's rule-breaker enemies. But Zbyszko was always being compared to the great champion, and slowly the realization dawned on him that he would always be in Sammartino's shadow. No matter what he did, no matter how good he became, he would always be number two. For a man with Zbyszko's ego, the position was intolerable.

Zbyszko began to feel that instead of helping his career, Bruno Sammartino was really hindering it. He felt that he would never get the title shot that he deserved and that his best years as a wrestler were slipping away.

"Bruno deliberately stabbed me in the back. He tried to stifle my career," said Larry. Why would Sammartino do such a thing? Zbyszko believes it was because the champ was trying to advance the career of his own son. "His main reason was to get behind his son and help his boy wrestle. Bruno had to get rid of me," Larry explained.

Instead, Zbyszko nearly got rid of Sammartino. The two former friends wrestled in an exceptionally grueling and brutal steel-cage match before 40,000 fans at Shea Stadium in New York. The younger man won and promptly crowned himself the "new living legend." A short time later Sammartino retired from active combat.

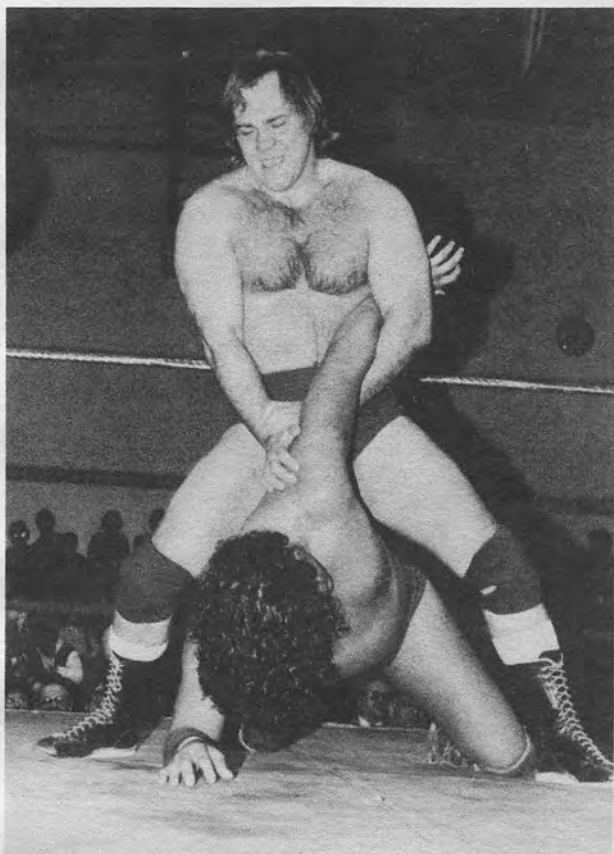
However, you can't win a championship in a

steel-cage match. After a brief interlude a new WWF champ was crowned, Bob Backlund. Zbyszko and Backlund met and Zbyszko has always felt he beat Backlund, but was denied the belt because of the rules which favor title holders. The champ must be pinned or submit before he has to surrender his title.

Zbyszko then quit the WWF in search of some sort of title in one of the other wrestling associations. His once shining reputation was now in tatters. Zbyszko had become known as one of the most vicious and angry rule breakers. A lot of men refused to step inside the ring with him for fear of being seriously injured. Zbyszko's quest for a championship was continually frustrated. Larry went so far as to buy a championship from Killer Brooks for \$25,000. He claimed he did this only because he couldn't get major matches. Zbyszko was quickly stripped of the belt, a move that only embittered him further.

Larry Zbyszko is currently wrestling in the AWA and doing a Roddy Piper type of interview show. He lacks Piper's crazy humor. But when it comes to pure anger and hatred, Larry Zbyszko has it all over "Rowdy" Roddy.

Zbyszko's former friend and tag-team partner, all-time wrestling great Nick Bockwinkel, has put off his own retirement in order to get Zbyszko. "You should be locked away for the



Larry Zbyszko in action. © Paul Heyman

crimes you've committed," Bockwinkel told Zbyszko. "But I want a piece of you before the courts get you."

This is not one of wrestling's manufactured feuds. It's the real thing.

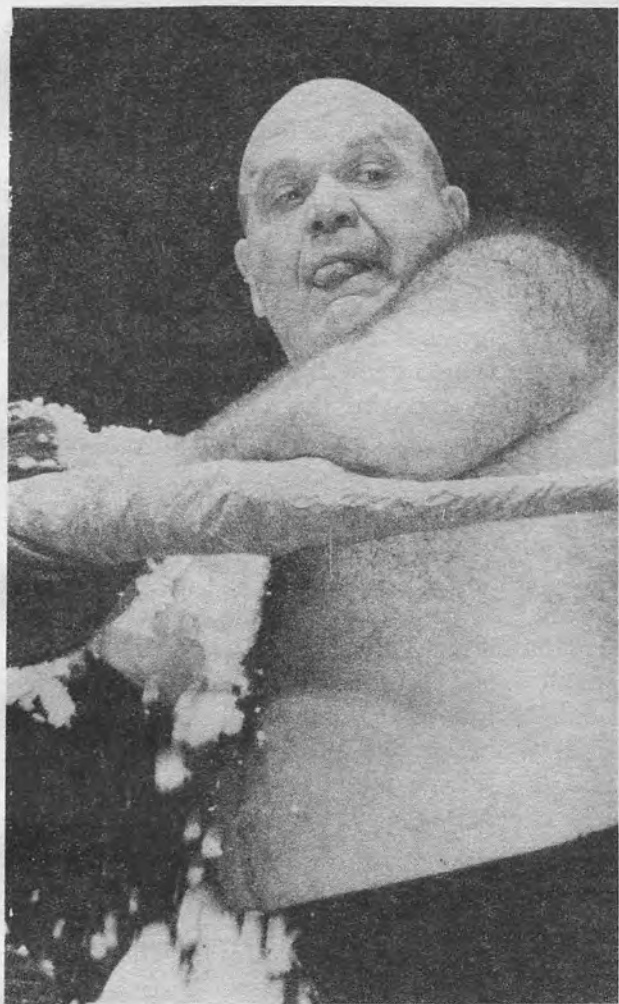
OTHERS

GEORGE "THE ANIMAL" STEELE

Ask any group of knowledgeable wrestling fans who's the weirdest wrestler around today and the name they would probably single out most often is that of George "the Animal" Steele. There are a lot of things that make the Animal weird. There's his bald head, which contrasts starkly with his unnaturally hairy body. There's his tongue, which sort of hangs out of his mouth much of the time (the tongue, incidentally, is green). There are the strange grunting and wheezing noises that he uses instead of speech. Then there is his memorable and endearing habit of chewing up the padding on turnbuckles.

In the ring, the Animal, as his name might imply, is a wild man and an enormously strong one. He looks totally out of control.

Referee Al Vass had this to say about him: "I've been in the ring with that man many times, and I've never seen a crazier wrestler. I never know if he even understands me when I



George "the Animal" Steele destroying the turnbuckle.

tell him to break a hold. He just looks at you with those rolling eyes and starts grunting and groaning like a rhinoceros. . . . Refereeing a George Steele match is like being trapped in a cage with a rabid St. Bernard."

Yet while the Animal's craziness is not just a pose, it's not all there is to this wrestler either. Behind the wildness is a craftiness developed during years of ring wars. Take the Animal's habit of turnbuckle chewing. Sometimes he has been known to chew the padding right off the turnbuckle, exposing the metal connectors underneath. He will carefully conceal what he has done until he gets the chance to slam his opponent's head into the damaged turnbuckle. It's not scientific wrestling, but it's terribly effective.

The Animal has been around for a long time, and he's fought the best. The most common result of a George Steele match is a disqualification, after the Animal does something utterly outrageous and so completely illegal that the referee simply can't ignore it. That's why Steele has never become a champ, though he has given several champs some of the worst moments they have ever had in the ring.

Wrestling legend Bruno Sammartino is one of those who has faced the fury of the Animal. He said, "That man is crazy. I've faced big men, strong men, many powerful men in my career, but I've never been up against anyone

as crazy and wild as George Steele. Looking back, I would have to rate him right up there as one of my toughest opponents."

The Animal has had many managers including the late Grand Wizard of Wrestling, Lou Albano, Fred Blassie and Mr. Fuji. All of them were notable managers of bad guys, and that's certainly what George Steele has been through the bulk of his career. But recently there has been a change. Steele has again come under the guidance of Albano, but Albano himself has changed. Now he manages the good guys. It would be wrong to say that the Animal has suddenly become a good guy, but with Albano setting up the matches Steele has recently been unleashing his ferocity on rule breakers. The man with the green tongue has almost developed into a fan favorite.

Love has also come to George "the Animal" Steele. He has become wildly infatuated with the silent but beautiful manager of "Macho Man" Randy Savage—Miss Elizabeth. This has led to a notable feud between the two. The sight of the Macho Man drives Steele into a frenzy.

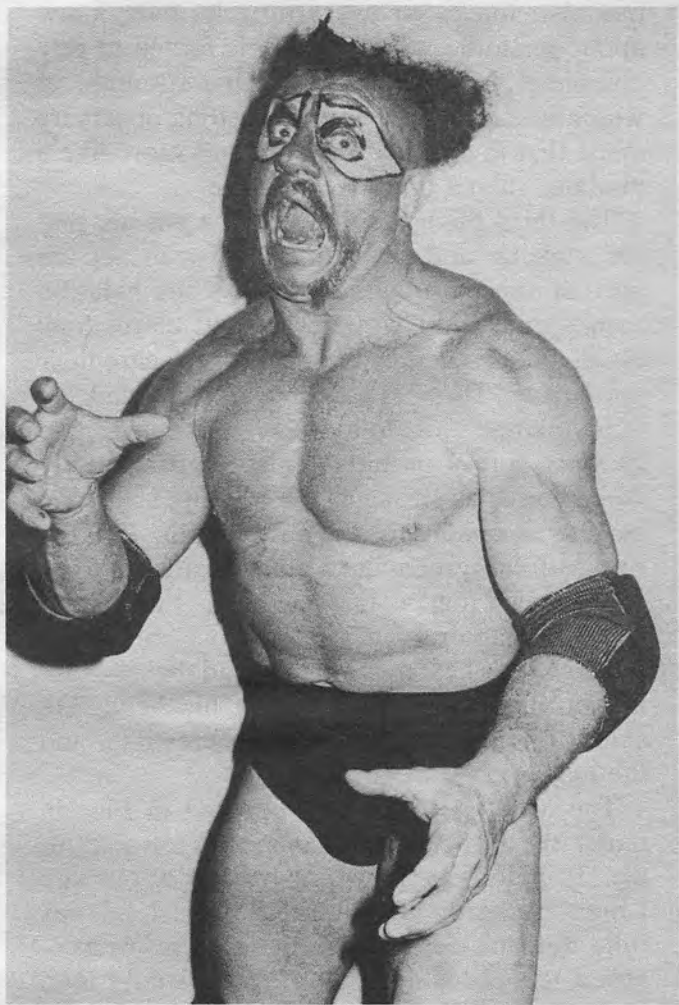
The Animal has sent Miss Elizabeth a very unique and personal gift; a dozen roses packed in the stuffing from his favorite turnbuckle.

THE MISSING LINK

There are several popular theories about the origin of that strange and brutal brawler known as the Missing Link. One is that the Link really is some sort of primitive, not quite human creature. Supporters of this theory say that's why his managers are always so secretive about him. They are afraid that if the wrestling authorities ever got a close look at their protégé, they would discover that he is not really human, and would be immediately banned from the ring.

Wrestling is supposed to be limited to human beings, though there are a couple of wrestlers beside the Missing Link who make you wonder. None makes you wonder more than the Missing Link with his green face paint, random tufts of hair and wildly unpredictable behavior inside the ring.

Another popular theory is that the Missing Link was once a well-known scientific wrestler who simply flipped out after suffering severe injuries. If this theory is correct, then the Link



The Missing Link. © George Napolitano.

has also forgotten everything he ever knew about scientific wrestling and is forced to rely completely on instinct and brute strength, of which he has plenty. Some wrestling observers insist that in the ring the Link acts more like a madman than a primitive creature.

The third theory is that it's all a put-on, that the makeup and the whole wild-man act are part of this particular wrestler's intimidation campaign. Many wrestlers shout about how tough and brutal they are in order to scare their opponents. They will wear war paint and get funny haircuts just to look fierce. Pretending to be some sort of primitive creature, particularly when you're as strong as the Missing Link, can be very intimidating. Anyone stepping into the ring with this green-faced monstrosity has to be wondering if maybe, just maybe, that guy really is a wild man or a nut.

The Link's best move is the head thrust—that is, butting his opponent with his head. He surely has the hardest head in wrestling, and the maneuver is devastating.

The Missing Link first appeared in Florida under the direction of manager Percival Pringle. Pringle was very mysterious about the Link's background, but he did insist he was fully human. He said, "The Link's no beast—he's a tender-loving soul." Pringle would then go on to describe how the Link's favorite food

was alligator, and how he would catch the big reptiles and devour them raw!

"Catching his own meat keeps him in shape, and it keeps him in touch with his roots, too," said Pringle. Tender-loving soul, indeed!

The Link then showed up in the ranks of the WWF, and he looked perfect for that organization's exotic promotions. You could just see the wild man tearing up Piper's Pit. But something seems to have gone wrong and the Link disappeared from WWF territory, and showed up in the South again. Perhaps he missed those raw alligators for lunch. His new manager was ex-valley-girl Sunshine—truly a beauty-and-the-beast combination.

Strangely, even the Link has his female admirers. The magazine *Sports Review Wrestling* asked readers the following question, "If you could date one person in professional wrestling, who would it be?"

A woman from New Jersey replied: "You'll probably get mail about this one, but if I had one date with a professional wrestler, it would be without a doubt the Missing Link. Besides his gorgeous body, what I like most about him is his unpredictability. . . ."

As they say, it takes all kinds to make a world.

TEAMS

THE BRITISH BULLDOGS

The current WWF tag-team champions Davy Boy Smith and the Dynamite Kid, known collectively as the British Bulldogs, hold a unique position in wrestling today. They are naturally enough loved by WWF fans. But many long-time wrestling fans don't like the WWF, because they think it's too much show and too little wrestling. Yet even WWF haters love and respect the British Bulldogs. The reason is simple enough: they are the most athletic and talented team to appear on the wrestling scene in years. They are pure excitement in the ring.

The British Bulldogs are not exactly newcomers. No one could develop the sort of skills this pair possesses overnight. The Dynamite Kid, who was born with the name Tommy Billington, is twenty-eight years old, and had once been WWF junior heavyweight champion. He has also held a number of other championships around the world, and is considered, pound for pound, to be one of the best wrestlers active today. Davy Boy Smith, twenty-three years old,



The British Bulldogs and manager Captain Lou Albano.

has also held championships in Canada. They have been wrestling as a team and individually for a number of years.

But it wasn't until they entered the WWF, and began appearing regularly on TV, that the mass of ordinary wrestling fans got a look at these two extraordinary athletes. The Bulldogs have enlisted the services of super manager Captain Lou Albano, "the manager of champions." And indeed, under Albano's management, they did win the tag-team championship. But did the Bulldogs need the Captain for wrestling advice, or merely as a public-relations man? A lot of admirers of the Bulldogs think that they do fine in the ring without any help

from Albano. Indeed, they fear Albano may one day double-cross his champions.

Albano's public-relations help, however, has been invaluable. The British Bulldogs are not a flashy-looking pair. They wear ordinary tights, and avoid makeup and strange haircuts. They don't shout at interviews. Their thick British accents make them rather difficult for Americans to understand. Outside the ring the Captain does most of the talking. Inside the ring, however, Dynamite and Davy Boy don't need words or threats.

The Bulldogs are not as large as monster teams like the Road Warriors. They are, however, exceptionally strong, agile and well matched. Sometimes in the ring it's hard to tell them apart. They have an unbelievable series of moves—suplexes, snap suplexes, hanging suplexes and the spectacular superduper plex, in which the Dynamite Kid jumps from the top of the corner turnbuckle. There is also the move in which Davy Boy Smith picks up the Dynamite Kid high overhead and hurls him down on an opponent. That one always finishes the match.

"It's an incredible phenomenon," said *Inside Wrestling* editor-in-chief Peter King. "This is a team that doesn't concern itself with rock 'n' roll or dolls or merchandising or pie fights or hillbilly music. They concern themselves with pure wrestling. They've brought literally doz-

ens of new aerial moves to the sport, and their repertoire of finishing sequences is astounding. And even more astounding is the fact that they just keep getting better and better all the time, with no end in sight."

For WWF wrestling fans, the question is not so much how long will the British Bulldogs hold their title, but who can possibly take it away from them.

THE FREEBIRDS

The Freebirds, or the Fabulous Freebirds as they are sometimes called, like to advertise the fact that they come from "Bad Street USA." That's in Atlanta, Georgia.

"We grew up on Bad Street," boasted Michael Hayes, who usually serves as spokesman for the terrible threesome. "It was a street so mean that the further you walked down, the meaner it got. And me and my brothers lived in the last house on the block! That can tell you how tough we are."

Another way to tell how tough they are is to watch them wrestle, either as a three-man tag

team, two of them as a standard tag team or as individuals.

Terry Gordy, the one with the long curly brown locks, is probably the strongest wrestler of the trio. Buddy Roberts, the clean-shaven one with the short bleached hair, is the quietest of the three—though no Freebird can truly be called quiet. But it's Michael Hayes, with the beard and the long bleached hair, who makes the most noise. Not only does he shout during interviews, he also sings. He was the lead singer on a record called appropriately enough, "Bad Street USA." The song enjoyed considerable popularity throughout several southern states, and is still selling. The song was more popular than the Freebirds themselves, for they had become engaged in a long and brutal feud in Texas with the Von Erich clan. There were individual contests, two- and three-man tag-team matches, six-man free-for-alls, steel-cage matches, six-man free-for-alls in steel cages, just about every variation a wrestling promoter could imagine. In the end the Von Erichs came out ahead—they usually do in Texas.

So the Freebirds headed back to their home state of Georgia where they are well known, if not always well loved. But the competition wasn't there, and there was another lure—New York City. In New York, Vince McMahon's promotion-minded WWF was really pushing the rock and wrestling connection. Besides, there



The Fabulous Freebirds in their own brand of Confederate war paint. © Paul Heyman

were all those record companies in New York. The Freebirds jumped to the WWF and signed on with Dave Wolff, manager of rock star Cyndi Lauper. Wolff was trying to get into the wrestling game as well.

There were rumors that the Freebirds were going to split with Michael Hayes and pursue a singing career rather than a wrestling one. It never happened. In fact, very little happened for the Freebirds in the WWF, and after a few months they left New York to return to the more receptive and familiar environs of the South. What went wrong? Was it Wolff's lack of

experience as a manager of wrestlers, or the fact that three-man tag teams are not all that popular in WWF territory? Or was it just that the boys from Bad Street didn't mix well with the boys from Broadway? No one is talking.

The Freebirds were welcomed back by Dixie fans, and for a while even attained the status of fan favorites. But their incessant bragging, their usual roughhouse tactics, and their willingness to ignore the rules soon began earning them the boos that they have been familiar with for most of their careers.

The Freebirds were home again, carrying on the Bad Street tradition. They are still the meanest guys on the block.

THE FABULOUS ONES

The Fabulous Ones, not to be confused with the Fabulous Freebirds, are one of the longest-lived, and most popular teams in wrestling. Their popularity, especially with female fans, is not hard to explain. Just look at them. These Florida boys are blond, well built and deeply tanned—they are, in short, very good looking. They're flashy dressers, too, their symbol being a white bow tie, and occasionally white gloves.

The Fabulous Ones are Stan Lane and Steve Keirn and though they've been together for nearly eight years, they were not always good friends. Indeed, when they were wrestling as individuals they seemed to be mortal enemies who battled one another in a long series of brutal and evenly matched contests.

Then promoter Jackie Fargo decided that since they did seem so evenly matched, they would make an excellent tag team. He persuaded them to team up, and the combination clicked. Their careers, as a team, soared.

Some of their opponents have tried to deride

the Fabs as mere pretty boys—but there are an awful lot of ugly guys in wrestling who have regretted that particular insult. The Fabs' primary shortcoming is size. Their combined weight is 465 pounds, so they are not small in terms of the general population. But wrestlers are not part of the general population. Andre the Giant weighs more than both the Fabs put together. The combined weight of the Road Warriors—one of the nation's top tag teams—is a full one hundred pounds more than the combined weight of the Fabulous Ones.

There is a truism in sports that a good big man will always beat a good little man. In several notable battles with the Warriors, the bigger men won, but the Fabs made one heck of a fight out of each and every match. Some fans believe that if it weren't for the outside interference of Warriors' manager Precious Paul Ellering, the little men would have won. Usually, Stan and Steve rely on their speed and agility to win matches, but with the Warriors inside the ring and Ellering giving a lot more than moral support from the outside, they felt they needed something extra during the rematch.

In a 1985 match in Chicago, Illinois, the Fabs rushed into the ring carrying metal chairs and proceeded to beat the Warriors with them. It wasn't enough, since the Road Warriors and Paul Ellering won again. That loss was part of a

very disappointing year for the Fabulous Ones. For a while they withdrew to the smaller arenas of the South where they retained a solid core of fans, who didn't care about losses, but were just happy to see the good-looking team wrestle in their home town.

By early 1986, however, the Fabulous Ones came roaring back with a series of impressive victories over some of the best tag teams in the business. They may have been in a slump, but the Fabulous Ones are proving that a slump is not the start of a permanent decline.

THE HART FOUNDATION

Jimmy Hart is a weasel. Practically everyone would agree with that statement. Even Jimmy Hart's mother would probably agree. The Mouth of the South is one of the most slimy characters in wrestling, a world in which there is plenty of slimy competition.

The Mouth of the South rushes up and down at ringside shouting encouragement to his fighters and abuse at his men's opponents, and the fans, through his ever-present bullhorn. Even if

you liked what he had to say, you'd have to hate his clothes. His jackets would make Liberace's tailor blush.

But whatever you think of Jimmy Hart as a person, he has proved to be a very successful manager of wrestlers. All that screaming and sniveling really does have its effect. He has put together a tag-team combination with a name that is both appropriate and wildly misleading—the Hart Foundation. It sounds like a charitable organization. It's anything but that.

The Hart Foundation is made up of handsome young Brett Hart and the more experienced Jim "the Anvil" Neidhart. Brett Hart says that he has been offered jobs as a male model, but wrestling is his first love and takes up all his time. He knows he has a lot to learn about the business, but the only way you can get to the top is by wrestling all the time and winning most of the time.

Jim Neidhart used to be a truck driver, and he looks like one. No one ever offered him a job as a male model. He discovered wrestling while passing through the Carolinas. After seeing a couple of matches, he decided that was what he wanted to do, and he's been doing it ever since.

Brett Hart, who is surprisingly soft spoken for a professional wrestler, becomes quietly outraged when he is accused of being a brutal rule breaker. He said, "What do you mean we break rules? We don't have to. It hurts my

feelings when I'm accused of being a cheat. I'm a nice guy."

Neidhart is a little more outspoken. "I'm not admitting that we cheat. But we're tough and mean. You have to be in this business. If you give anyone an opportunity, you'll be sorry. If you can't both take the punishment and be able to dish it out, then you shouldn't be in wrestling. It's that simple."

And what does the Mouth of the South have to say? He insists that the Hart Foundation is the greatest team in wrestling. He's willing to back them any way he can. In a match with the team of Barry Windham and Mike Rotundo, Hart hit Windham with his steel bullhorn. That earned the Hart Foundation a disqualification.

A disqualification, however, is not the same as a defeat in wrestling. Lots of matches end with disqualifications. The one who is disqualified can always claim he was robbed.

Said Neidhart, "We're not concerned with who does and doesn't like us, or who approves or disapproves. The fact is, we want big money, fame, fortune and success. And we want to remain undefeated. And no matter what has to be done to achieve those goals, we're going to do it. We want to be the greatest tag team in wrestling's history."

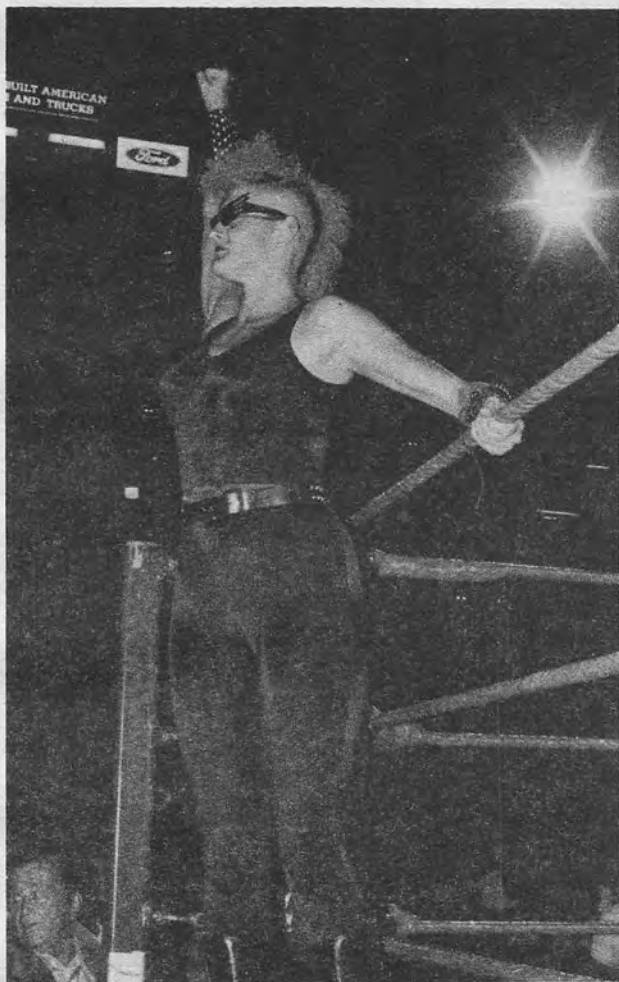
TREND SETTERS

LADY MAXINE

Women's wrestling is being shaken up by a striking new figure. For nearly thirty years women's wrestling was dominated by the Fabulous Moolah. Then Moolah was finally defeated for the WWF women's title by a former Dallas Cowgirl, Wendi Richter, who was being managed by rock star Cyndi Lauper. Moolah struck back not as a wrestler but as a manager of the tough and experienced Lelani Kai. Two weeks later it was Richter again.

It looked like the championship was now settled. Then a sudden challenge was mounted by a masked wrestler called the Spider Lady. She defeated Wendi, but when unmasked the Spider Lady turned out to be none other than the Fabulous Moolah herself. Moolah claimed that she wasn't the real Spider Lady, but the Spider Lady had been taken ill just before a match and Moolah, her manager, donned the mask and wrestled in her place. No one believed that story.

While all this was going on, something was



Lady Maxine. © Paul Heyman

happening in Florida which might ultimately overshadow all the matches between Wendi and Moolah in whatever guise she assumes. Woman's wrestling in Florida was being overpowered by a six-foot-four, 180-pound newcomer who wore war paint and a Mohawk haircut. She first wrestled under the name Mad Maxine and was known as a notorious rule breaker. Recently she has been trying to soften that image and now prefers to be called Lady Maxine. She has become as popular as most male wrestlers who appear on the card with her.

The former University of Kentucky basketball player is dominating women's wrestling in Florida mainly because she is so much bigger than anyone she wrestles. It's not just her size that makes her so dominant. Lady Maxine said, "Most women my size don't have the coordination that wrestling requires. The action is very precise—the right amount of pressure and leverage at the right time."

Lady Maxine is dead serious about the future of women's wrestling: "I'm out to change some things in women's wrestling. I think women have to be stronger than ever before. That's the only way that we as a group can gain respect—and the only way I can respect myself."

She doesn't have much respect for WWF champs like Wendi Richter and the Fabulous Moolah. She said, "Who cares about Richter?

Anyone can strap on a bikini and beat up on a grandmother to win a title. I doubt if she can breathe inside those scanty little tights she always wears. I'm a professional wrestler."

Lady Maxine's popularity has attracted the attention of wrestling's Prince of Darkness, Kevin Sullivan. He is reputedly training a woman who has variously been called Luna or Fallen Angel to challenge Maxine. Luna is no stranger to wrestling. Her real name is Angel Vachon, and she is the sister of a couple of wrestling's toughest, tough guys, Mad Dog and Butcher Vachon, and the sister of ex-wrestler Vivian Vachon, who will be handling most of Angel's training. Sullivan is just the front man here. Angel Vachon has a powerful wrestling clan behind her.

This potentially formidable challenge doesn't bother Lady Maxine one little bit. She says she's not afraid of anyone in pro wrestling—male or female—and she looks like she means it. A lot of the future of women's wrestling may rest with Lady Maxine.

CAPTAIN LOU ALBANO

They call him Captain Lou Albano. No one seems quite sure where the rank of Captain came from. But as far as wrestling managers are concerned, Louis Albano isn't just a captain, he's a general, a field marshal—no, a supreme commander. He is without any doubt the number-one manager in the history of pro wrestling. No one else is even close. You might get some argument from the likes of Fred Blassie and Bobby "the Brain" Heenan, but they're also managers, so their opinions are not exactly objective.

Lou Albano has been around the wrestling world for decades. Like most managers, he began his career as a wrestler. He gained his greatest success as part of a team called the Sicilians, with partner Tony Altamore. The pair held the world tag-team championship.

Albano's active career in the ring ended some twenty-five years ago, and he began to direct the careers of other wrestlers. No pro wrestler ever really retires completely. From time to

time, Albano has officially entered the ring as a contestant. In fact, in 1985 he wrestled another ex-wrestler and manager, Fred Blassie, and Blassie is even older than Albano. That match prompted some fans to suggest that professional wrestling establish a mandatory retirement age! Actually, Albano has been far more effective when he has entered the ring unofficially in defense of one of his wrestlers.

Albano was a good wrestler; he has been a great manager. The Captain has been called the "manager of champions" and no other manager has ever guided the fortunes of more champs than he has.

His first success was Ivan Koloff, the "Russian Bear." Under Albano's direction, Koloff was able to defeat the legendary champion Bruno Sammartino, then in his prime and considered virtually unbeatable. Albano was also the long-time manager of the Magnificent Muraco, though the pair has since parted company. Many feel that Muraco was much better with Albano by his side.

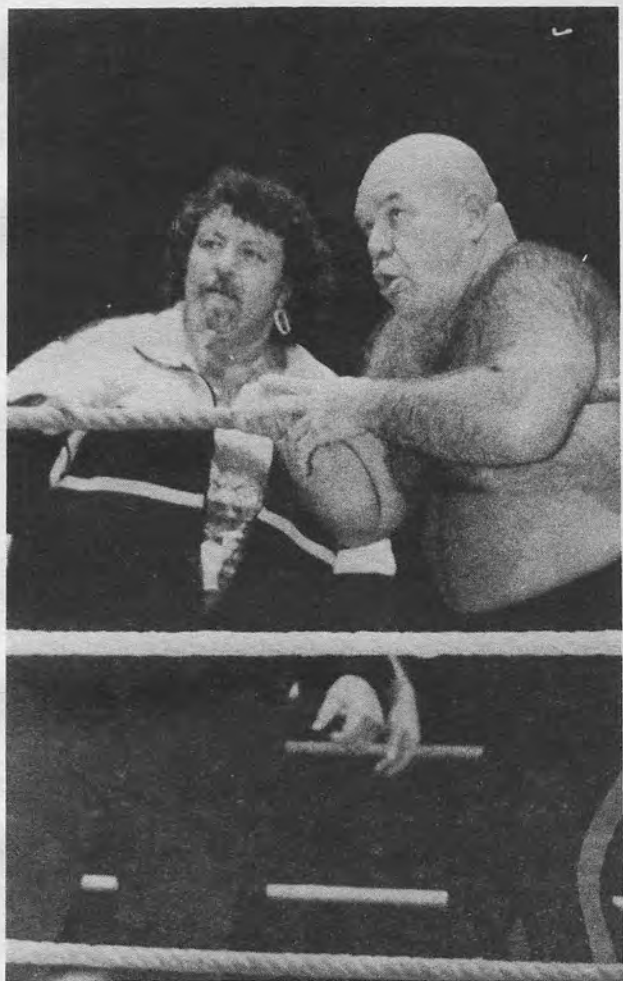
Lou Albano's greatest success has been as a manager of tag teams. His first championship team was the Mongols and others have included the Valiants, the Yukon Lumberjacks, the Samoans, the Moondogs, and his current WWF tag-team champions the British Bulldogs. He now has sixteen championship tag-team plaques on his wall and he's not finished

yet. And, oh yes, Lou Albano has managed one woman's wrestling champ, the Fabulous Moolah. That's another story, which we'll get to in a minute.

Since the Captain has been around for so long, his career has had a lot of ups and downs. He has earned the nickname "Slingshot" because he always seems to snap back from defeat. An article in *The Wrestler* described him this way: "The Captain has proven to have more staying power than Joan Collins and as much box-office clout as Clint Eastwood. For twenty years, in one incarnation or another, Lou Albano has come to embody pro wrestling's uncopied blend of color and performance."

Let's look at the color first, and start with Lou Albano's clothes. He is not only the worst dresser in wrestling, he is probably the worst dresser anywhere—ever. He favors outfits like high-top sneakers, Bermuda shorts and flowered shirts left open so as to expose his huge belly. In an age where thin is in, Lou Albano is very proud of that belly. Other wrestlers and managers dress strangely, but no matter how strange, most have some sense of style. Albano's outfits are simply awful.

Then there is his hair—long and wild as you might expect. He generally wears a beard, secured by a rubber band, and then strangest of all are the rubber bands that he attaches to his



Captain Lou Albano and George "the Animal" Steele.

cheeks. They just dangle there. If you're a new wrestling fan and wonder what those things are, they're rubber bands. The Captain insists they are very handy. Handy for what? we wonder. On some occasions he has worn the rubber bands attached to his ears like earrings.

Albano is an interviewer's delight. He can always be counted on to say something strange and original: "A great wrestling move is like a beautiful dame. When you see either one of them you go *oooh* and *aaah!*" He can be fierce, frightening, funny, even charming, but he is never, ever dull. That's probably why he is better known than most of the men he has managed.

When Albano wrestled, he was a bad guy, and he has spent most of his career as a manager of bad guys. He was a terror outside the ring, distracting his men's opponents, and often doing a good deal worse than that. He was not above slipping dangerous foreign objects to his charges during a match.

Wrestlers change a lot from good guy to bad guy. Managers usually manage only bad guys and rarely change. But this has not been the case with the durable and adaptable Lou Albano. He became one of the leaders in what was known as the rock and wrestling connection. He had a part in the popular Cyndi Lauper video for "Girls Just Want to Have Fun." He played Cyndi's slob of a father. The video was a

huge success and really made Cyndi's career. It didn't hurt Albano either, and the big former wrestler and tiny orange-haired singer seemed to be the best of friends. They made several other videos together. Albano has recently appeared in a film playing a heavy—naturally.

Then Lou began claiming that he had written Cyndi's big hit song, and that he, not Cyndi, should get all the credit. There was a big public fight and a challenge. Cyndi took as her champion the wrestler Wendi Richter. She was to challenge long-time woman's champ the Fabulous Moolah. Albano became Moolah's manager. The fight took place—actually there were several of them. Sometimes Wendi won; other times it was Moolah. In the end Cyndi and Albano made up and worked together collecting money for a very good cause.

That experience seemed to change the Captain. He shaved, got a haircut and removed the rubber bands. The new clean-looking Albano began managing fan favorites such as Barry Windham and Mike Rotundo. That pair became yet another Albano-managed tag-team champion. Windham and Rotundo lost their championship to the "dream team" of Greg Valentine and Brutis Beefcake. It wasn't a clean loss. Valentine's and Beefcake's manager, Lucious Johnny Valiant, slipped a cigar to Beefcake during the match, and Beefcake rubbed the ashes into Barry Windham's eyes. It

was the sort of thing Albano himself might once have done. Indeed, Albano had once been Valiant's manager.

After the loss, Windham and Rotundo left the WWF, and Albano found another team, the sensational British Bulldogs. This classy pair of high flyers soon got the belt back from Valentine and Beefcake.

Albano remains a great fan favorite, but recently he has been letting his hair and beard grow. His clothes look ratty again and the rubber bands are back dangling from his cheeks. The Captain is still firmly on the side of good against evil, but he is beginning to look like the Captain Louis Albano of old, and another change may be in the wind.

JIM CORNETTE

Jim Cornette has some liabilities as a manager. Most successful managers are ex-wrestlers. Cornette never wrestled professionally; he's too small and cowardly. He was once a close associate of another small cowardly manager, Jimmy "The Mouth of the South" Hart. In a

field where macho toughness is prized above practically anything else, Cornette is known as "Mama's boy." He *is* a mama's boy. His mother, Evelyn Cornette, who is very wealthy, has been supporting her baby boy's managing career for years.

Cornette makes no secret of the fact that he's a spoiled rich kid with a funny hobby. He dresses like a rich kid and he always carries a tennis racket. Jim Cornette looks as if he's about to trot off to the court for a gentlemanly game of tennis, and not off to the ring for a sweaty, brutal wrestling match. Cornette's an arrogant, nonstop talker who would irritate the most tolerant of people.

His family money is always lurking in the background, and Cornette does not hesitate to use it to further his career. The magazine *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* held a poll for the wrestling achievements of the year in 1985. Much to the surprise of practically everyone, Cornette topped the managing category, besting better-known managers such as Lou Albano, Paul Ellering and Bobby "The Brain" Heenan.

Cornette won the contest on a last-minute surge of ballots sent by Federal Express from his home town of Memphis, Tennessee. All the ballots were signed by one "Evelyn Cornell"—not a very convincing alias for mother Evelyn Cornette. Since there were no rules about the number of times a single individual could vote,



Jim Cornette and his Midnight Express. © Paul Heyman

all the last-minute ballots counted. The Federal Express costs alone would have been several thousand dollars. That doesn't even count how much Cornette money was spent bribing someone in the magazine's office to reveal how many votes were needed to win.

Wrestling columnist Stu Saks commented sourly, "In this case Evelyn Cornette bought this election for her son with a last-minute barrage of ballots."

But despite all of this, Cornette is turning out to be more than a publicity grabber, or a fellow who is willing to bop his man's opponent with

his ever-present tennis racket (although he certainly has done that often enough). Jim Cornette actually is a good judge of talent, and sometimes a brilliant strategist.

The most recent example of Cornette's skills is the tag team of "Loverboy" Dennis Condrey and "Beautiful" Bobby Eaton, known collectively as the Midnight Express. Both Condrey and Eaton had been around for some time, but neither had accomplished much until Cornette took over direction of their careers and built them, not only into contenders, but champions. Unlike other managers who simply buy the contracts of already successful wrestlers, Cornette has been able to create improved wrestlers. That's what a good manager is supposed to do.

Maybe Jim Cornette really did deserve that award his mother bought for him. Don't be fooled by that spoiled-rich-kid act. There is a very clever man behind the tennis racket.

VINCE MCMAHON, JR.

Who is the most loved and hated, admired and feared, clever and ruthless and by all accounts the most powerful man in pro wrestling today? Is it Hulk Hogan? Roddy Piper? Ric Flair?

It's none of the above. The man who fits that description has never wrestled professionally, though apparently he once considered the idea. The man is Vince McMahon, Jr., matchmaker, promoter, ringmaster and absolute boss of the WWF, the World Wrestling Federation.

Vince McMahon, Jr. comes by his position naturally. His father, Vince McMahon, Sr., had been head of the WWF for thirty-five years. It was a successful wrestling organization, but it was just one of three major wrestling federations. The others were the American Wrestling Alliance (AWA) and the National Wrestling Association (NWA). There were also dozens of smaller local promoters. The big guys and the little guys lived by a set of unwritten rules built up over the years. Each organization and each promoter had his own territory. One promoter

didn't run a card featuring his wrestlers in an area controlled by another promoter.

The promoters didn't love one another, but so long as they each stuck to the unwritten rules they got along pretty well. The WWF is centered in the Northeast. Its showcase is Madison Square Garden. Each major association (as well as a lot of local areas) has its own group of champions. In an informal sort of way, the different champions recognize one another. The magazine *Wrestling 86* points out that "a July 1972, WWF program featured Verne Gagne, Dory Funk, Jr., and Pedro Morales, the three world champions standing side by side on its cover."

But a few years later, Vince Sr. died, Vince Jr. took over the WWF and very quickly things began to change. He decided that the old arrangement had caused professional wrestling to grind to a standstill. In his view the whole promotion had become unimaginative, boring and much less profitable than it might be. So he broke the old rules. WWF wrestling cards began showing up in areas once firmly under the control of other promoters. There was certainly nothing illegal about this. Anyone can rent a stadium for almost any purpose. But it just wasn't the way things had been done in the past.

The WWF had an even bigger impact on TV. Wrestling was becoming popular on cable television. McMahon got his WWF shows on sev-



Vince McMahon, Jr. The most powerful man in wrestling.
© Paul Heyman

eral major cable networks and a lot of local stations as well. The only network TV wrestling show, *Saturday Night's Main Event* is a WWF-sponsored card. While there are other wrestling shows on TV, the WWF shows are certainly the most dominant.

McMahon has also stressed the entertainment side of wrestling. He began the *Wrestling TNT* show, which is part interview show, part entertainment show, and sort of a—well, you have to see it to believe it. On a Halloween show, Captain Lou Albano was giving a pumpkin-carving demonstration, while dressed as a pumpkin. On another show, WWF champ Hulk Hogan played the guitar while McMahon and sidekick “Mean Gene” Okerlan played the piano and sang. Hogan was pretty good (he once wanted to be a musician). The less said about Mean Gene’s singing the better, though his piano playing was tolerable.

Speaking of music, it was McMahon and the WWF that pioneered the rock and wrestling connection. Rock star Cyndi Lauper was the manager of WWF women’s wrestling champ Wendi Richter. The WWF even had a successful record album where some of the wrestlers and their managers sang. The WWF sponsored wrestling music awards called the “Slammys.”

The WWF is behind the biggest wrestling extravaganzas, including *Wrestlemania* and

Wrestlemania 2, which feature, along with the wrestlers, all sorts of celebrities, from rock stars to football stars.

The WWF markets a whole variety of products, from T-shirts, magazines and hats to wrestling dolls. There is even a cartoon show based on WWF wrestlers.

One of the most striking features of McMahon's WWF, and one that often confuses wrestling fans, is the federation's complete refusal to acknowledge that there is any pro wrestling outside of the WWF. If a wrestler signs with the WWF, you never hear anything about his earlier career. If he quits the WWF, he is never mentioned again. Have you heard a WWF announcer mention the name Sergeant Slaughter lately? For a while the Sarge was a McMahon favorite. Then there was a falling out and Sarge went to a rival promoter. As far as the WWF is concerned, the Sarge dropped off the edge of the earth.

Barry Windham, a popular young wrestler who, with his friend Mike Rotundo held the WWF tag-team championship, quit in anger. He said, "Vince McMahon is trying to make himself the Johnny Carson of wrestling with his TNT show. He is more into the entertainment aspect; he wants to make everybody a cartoon character."

Windham, whose father is Blackjack Mulligan, another professional wrestler, said,

"I believe in wrestling as wrestling." Yet before he left the WWF, Windham did appear in a wrestling music video. He's the guy who picks up Paul Orndorff, so he can grab rock singer Meatloaf's drum. Windham regrets that moment.

So Vince McMahon, Jr. has a lot of enemies in the wrestling world. Many old-time fans think he has gone too far in making wrestling entertaining. They think that a lot of people who are now attracted to wrestling are really celebrity mongers, not true wrestling fans.

McMahon doesn't bother to answer his detractors publicly. But what he might say is, "You can't argue with success." The fact is that the WWF promotions have been enormously successful. They have attracted a huge number of new fans to wrestling. Whether they are "true wrestling fans" or not is something we can't judge. It all depends on what you consider a "true wrestling fan." The new fans go to the matches and they watch them on TV, just like the old fans do.

To hear some old-time fans talk, you might get the idea that pro wrestling before Vince Jr. was clean and pure like college or high-school wrestling. A couple of big strong guys would get in the ring and wrestle one another by the rules. But pro wrestling was never like that. There was always a big spectacle and the entertainment element. There were wrestlers with

funny names and fancy outfits. The rules never meant very much. Wrestlers would change their identity or hide it by wearing a mask. Outside the ring the wrestlers were always grabbing the mike and bellowing threats at one another. Matches often had celebrity referees, usually retired boxers or other sports figures. Souvenirs were often sold at matches.

In short, McMahon didn't really bring anything new into wrestling. He just took what was already there and expanded it. He made it grander and gaudier than ever.

Has he gone too far? Only time will tell. But other wrestling associations have started their own TV interview shows. They are staging rock-'n'-roll-influenced wrestling spectacles, and they are selling their own official wrestling action figures.

As McMahon might have said, "You can't argue with success."

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